WINNING STRATEGIES FOR AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

MARCH 2003 ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA

THE #1 PC GAMING MAGAZINE FOR 20 YEARS

GIANT NEW DOOM III SCREEN-SHOT!

25+ Hot Reviews!

Splinter Cell • Asheron's Call 2
SimCity 4 • 007: NightFire
Starfleet Command III
Robin Hood • Arx Fatalis

EXCLUSIVE!

WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE

World's first look at the creatures, heroes, and spells of Blizzard's awesome new expansion!

INSIDE GAME OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

Display Until March 4
03>
0 70992 06950 7
$7.99 USA, $8.99 Canada

In the modern world,

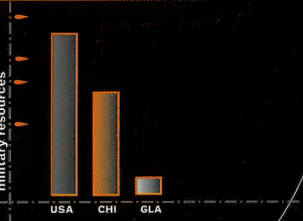
GREAT LEADERS RESOLVE CONFLICT

WITH WORDS

the threat

UNITED STATES:

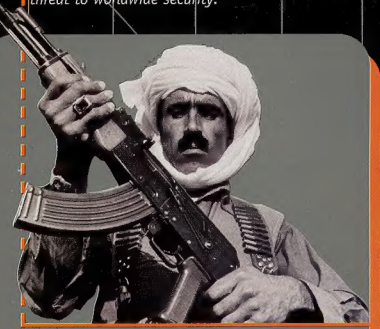
Roused by GLA bio-terrorism attacks, the U.S. must now act decisively. America's military leader faces the unenviable task of rooting out an elusive foe. The world's most advanced military — armed with Daisy-Cutter bombs and Comanche Gunships — will make the job easier. But eradicating the cell-based GLA will also take courage, conviction and the will to see a prolonged campaign through to the end.



GET BRIEFED AT GENERALS.EA.COM

THE WILD CARD:

Despite inferior military resources, the GLA still poses a very credible threat to worldwide security.



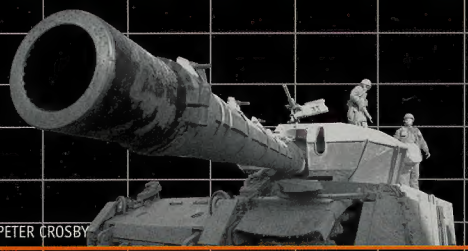
GLOBAL LIBERATION ARMY:

Facing superior firepower, the GLA embraces bio-terrorism, sabotage and suicide bombings to further its political agenda. But leading a chaotic group of "freedom" fighters against two global super-powers will take some doing.

© 2003 Electronic Arts Inc. Electronic Arts, Command & Conquer, EA GAMES and the EA GAMES logo and "Challenge Everything" are trademarks or registered trademarks of Electronic Arts Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. All rights reserved. The Way It's Meant to be Played logos and other NVIDIA Marks are trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. EA GAMES™ is an Electronic Arts™ brand.

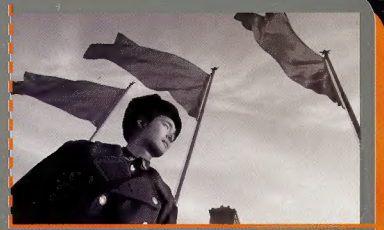
WORDS LIKE:

"CARPET BOMBING," "SCUD LAUNCHERS" AND "TOMAHAWK MISSILES."



By PETER CROSBY

Recent military aggressions around the globe have many nations worried. Between the United States, China and the Global Liberation Army, tensions run high. Their leaders profess no interest in escalating the situation, but words ring hollow when satellite photos tell a different story. The issue is no longer "*Will* there be military conflict?" but instead, "Who will *prevail*?"



CHINA:

No longer just a red-communist step-child, China's modern army is well-financed with a strong nationalistic bent. Parading technology like Dragon Tanks and Nuclear Missiles, China's military goes beyond large troop numbers. But defeating the agile GLA is still no walk in Yangmingshan National Park. *So while their new military is formidable, so is the task ahead.*

COMMAND & CONQUER GENERALS

February 11th, 2003

EA GAMES

Challenge Everything™

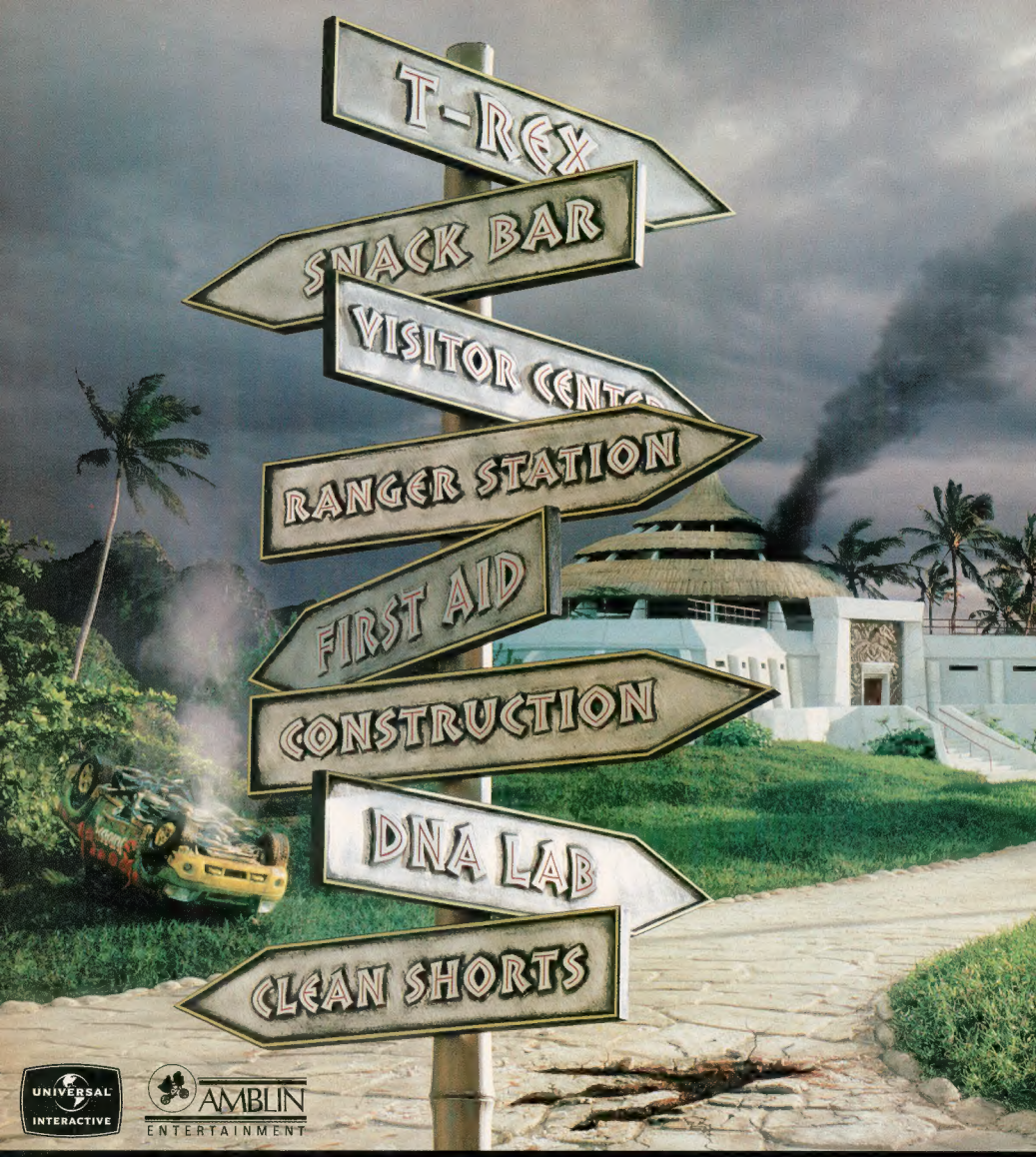
TEEN T Violence CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PC CD ROM

The Way It's Meant to be Played NVIDIA

GLOBAL INSECURITY:

Using diplomacy to achieve the peaceful settlement of international disputes has often met with only limited success. In times of global crisis, government representatives do their utmost to prevent armed, military conflict. All too often, however, it is not enough.



The first ever 3-D action-packed sim.

Create the ultimate interactive Jurassic Park.

Try to manage over 25 ferocious dinosaurs.

12 adrenaline pumped missions.

KONAMI

XBOX

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

PlayStation.2

JURASSIC PARK™
OPERATION GENESIS

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Violence

VIVENDI UNIVERSAL games

bluetongue

universalinteractive.com

"Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis" interactive game © 2002 Universal Interactive, Inc. Jurassic Park is a trademark and copyright of Universal Studios and Amblin Entertainment, Inc. Licensed by Universal Studios Licensing LLLP. Published and distributed by Universal Interactive, Inc. and Konami Corporation. Microsoft, Xbox, and the Xbox logo are either registered trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All rights reserved.

FROM THE CREATORS OF

COMMANDOS

Feed your insatiable hunger to rule the empire with this combat-heavy epic adventure

Ambush your enemy using a variety of units, massive fortress sieges, devastating war machines and more

Master the art of war in 24 single-player missions

Battle for supremacy online in ruthless 8-player matches

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

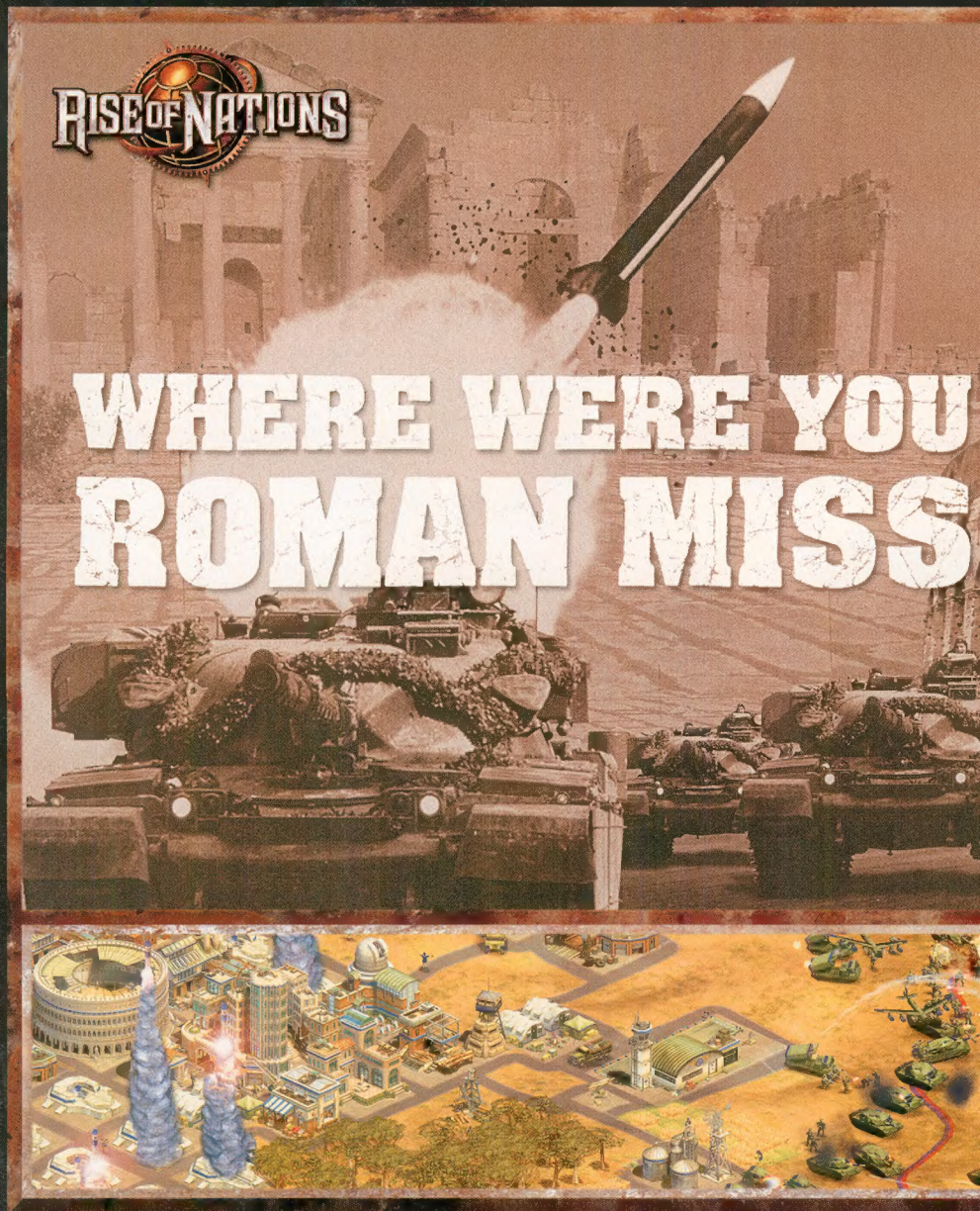
Play the demo at:
PraetoriansGame.com

POWERED BY gamespy

PYRO STUDIOS EIDOS INTERACTIVE

Praetorians is a trademark of Pyro Studios S.L. Pyro Studios and the Pyro Studios logo are both trademarks of Pyro Studios S.L. ©2002, 2003 Pyro Studios. Eidos Interactive and the Eidos Interactive logo are registered trademarks of Eidos Interactive, Inc. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association. GameSpy and the "Powered by GameSpy" design are trademarks of GameSpy Industries, Inc. All rights reserved.

PRAETORIANS™
DEATH OR GLORY? Your destiny awaits on the battlefield.
As a Roman General on a crusade to forge an empire, you must
employ cunning military operations to conquer the lands of
the ferocious Gauls and religiously fanatical Egyptians.
Soon, the die will be cast...



RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for more info.
BIG HUGE GAMES
Microsoft game studios
POWERED BY gamespy
www.microsoft.com/games/riseofnations

DURING THE ILE CRISIS?

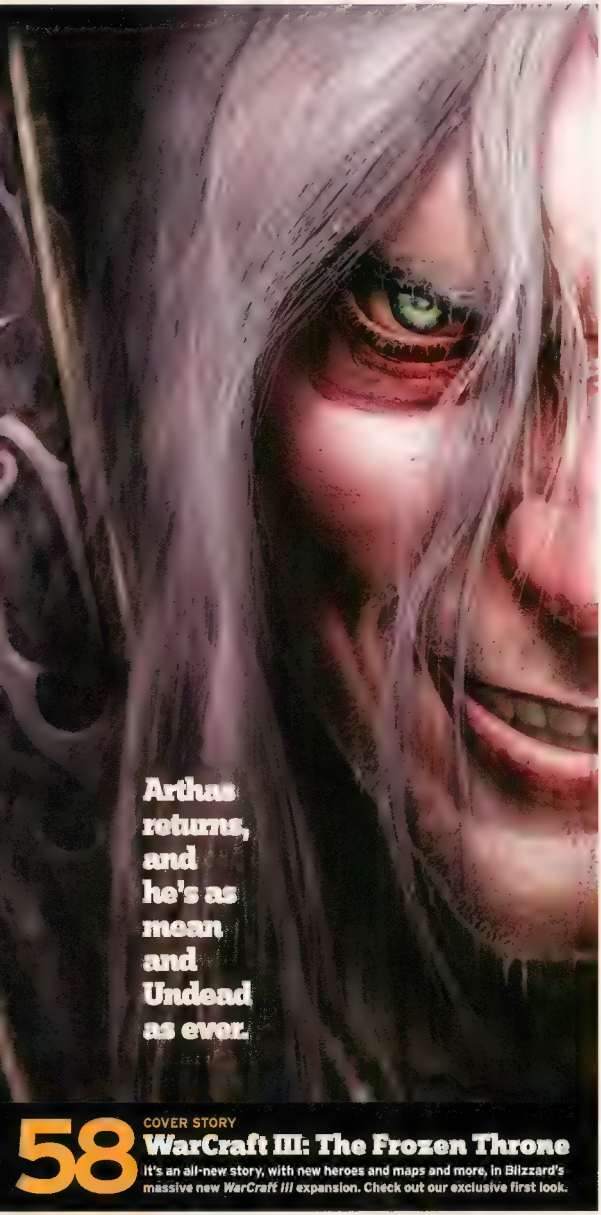
LIFE STOOD STILL FOR 13 MINUTES. History changes in an instant. Never more so than in Rise of Nations, a new real-time strategy game from Brian Reynolds, lead designer of Civilization II. It's the most intense RTS of its kind. Think fast. Fight faster. Defend, defeat, bargain, befriend, plot and plunder. Do it all under the gun with zero margin for error. Nothing is historically impossible, and only the quick and the brazen survive.

MAKE HISTORY

COMING APRIL 2003

RISE OF NATIONS

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD March 2003 Issue #224



58 COVER STORY
WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne
It's an all-new story, with new heroes and maps and more, in Blizzard's massive new *WarCraft III* expansion. Check out our exclusive first look.

10 **Editorial**
Another page of dribble from our sad, absent-minded leader.

14 **Letters**
Readers speak out in defense of **America's Army,** take Wil to task for his Ultimate Game Machine, and spew invectives against lousy game expansions. Plus: no druids or Canadians.

24 **Loading...**
Boys and girls, have we got a treat for you: a sweet yet subtle screen from **Doom III.** Then, it's followed by a really racy picture of...well...a spaceship from **Eve: The Second Genesis.**

32 **Read Me**
Game of the Year Nominees: **Jedi Knight II**? **Battlefield 1942**? Hide the Salami? A revealing look behind the skirt at our favorite diversions of 2002. We'll also peek at **Sea Dogs II, Devastation,** and other oddities and highlights from the front lines of computerdom.

Columns
38 Scott McCloud

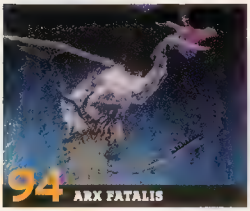
70 **Lionhead**
What weirdness lurks in the mind of the man who gave us **Dungeon Siege** and **Black & White**? We trekked to England to find out about **Black & White 2** and to see **The Movies.**

112 **Tech**
Reviewed: Hypersonic's UGM-capable PC, the Sonic Boom; Logitech's cordless joystick; Creative Labs' iPod-killing MP3 player; and Logitech's top-notch 5.1 speakers. Also, Loyd Case talks about hot machines. And don't forget Wil Power, Tech Medics, and Killer Rigs.

121 **Gamer's Edge**
Learn how to be a sniper, or just shoot like one, with strategies from Prima for **America's Army.** Plus, Bruce and Tom go back to war in the **Age of Mythology, Combat Mission 2** heats up with tips for your transfer to the Eastern Front, and course design is made easy for **Links 2003.**

136 **Scorched Earth**
Jeez, we give the guy a column, and now he wants a vacation. Freakin' whiner.

52 **PRAETORIANS**
Pyro Studios offers you the chance to indulge your inner Caeser.



94 **ARX FATALIS**

106 **TIGER WOODS 2003**

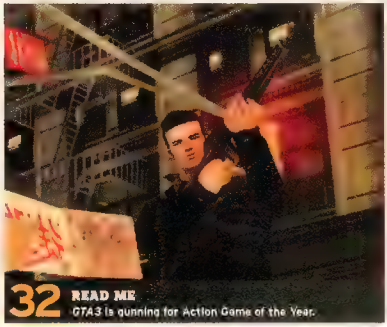
82 **SPLINTER CELL**

Previews

50 Rise of Nations
52 Praetorians

Reviews

82 Splinter Cell
84 SimCity 4
86 O.R.B.
88 Robin Hood: The Legend of Sherwood
90 Dragon's Lair 3D
92 Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings
94 Arx Fatalis
96 The Elder Scrolls III: Tribunal
97 Anarchy Online: Notum Wars
97 Revisionist History: Civilization III: Play the World
98 James Bond 007: NightFire
99 Platoon
100 Star Trek: Starfleet Command III
102 Soldiers of Anarchy
103 Deadly Dozen: Pacific Theater
104 G.I. Combat
104 World War II: Panzer Claws
105 Strike Fighters: Project 1
106 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003
106 Law & Order: Dead on the Money
107 RalliSport Challenge
108 Battle Realms: Winter of the Wolf
108 Zoo Tycoon: Marine Mania
109 Hegemonia
110 Astonia III



32 **READ ME**
GTA3 is gunning for Action Game of the Year.

112 **TECH**
Wait, wasn't the UGM two months ago?

Great Expectations

Legolas: Please call me. I love you

Hello, and welcome to another exciting edition of *Computer Gaming World*. Are you excited? I know I am. No, wait. That's the nipple clamps.

I'd like to begin this issue with some thoughts about expectations. We all have them, and they usually do nothing but mess up our ability to enjoy life. Take, for example, this very magazine. If you're a first-time reader, you might expect that for eight frickin' dollars, you will get not only a fine, professional gaming magazine, but also a CD full of demos, a double cheeseburger, and a personal thank-you kiss from Dana, our managing editor. Not so, chumley. You'll get the first two, I hope, but that's about it. Dana's married now, so she won't be kissing anyone anymore, including her husband in about six more months.

The point is: Expectations suck. I know they did for me during my first viewing of the spectacular *The Two Towers*. I loved it, but I was also so full of anticipation—because the first movie was so great, because I had just reread the book—that I felt strangely let down. The changes to Faramir annoyed me, Gimli was too goofy, and Legolas, despite being an über-badass, should not have gone skateboarding down the stairs of Helm's Deep. On the second viewing, however, I loved it, unabashedly. With my expectations now appropriately grounded, I appreciated it far more on its own terms and not filtered through what my ape brain imagined it would be.

Expectations mess up our ability to enjoy life.

The exact same thing also happened to me with *WarCraft III*. I loved the first two games tremendously, so there was just no way *WarCraft III* could have lived up to my expectations. And it didn't. Most of the *CGW* editors agreed, and we ended up giving the game four stars in our original review (Sept 2002). That's a good score, but not a great score—especially for Blizzard. But while working on this month's cover story I replayed the *WarCraft III* campaign—and this time I loved it. I'm not saying this just to get you to read the cover story or to suck up to Blizzard. (Frankly, *Warlords Battlecry II* was the best RTS I played this year.) But they are phenomenal designers, artists, and storytellers over at Blizzard, and replaying the game, and interviewing the team for this story, made me appreciate this all over again. Blizzard's biggest problem, really, is itself—the standards are so high now that anything less than perfection is deemed a "disappointment."

My suggestion to Blizzard? Make a tycoon game next. A really sucky one. Embarrass us all. Then go away for a year and make a kick-ass *StarCraft 2* like we all want you to. We'll weep in gratitude and never be "disappointed" in you again.

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

For service questions, address changes, or to order, please contact us. Web: service.computergamingworld.com (for customer service) or subscribe.computergamingworld.com (to order). Phone: U.S. or Canada (800) 827-4450 or (850) 682-7624; elsewhere (303) 604-7445

MAIL: Computer Gaming World, P.O. Box 57167, Boulder, CO 80322-7167. Please include your mailing label with any correspondence. Fax: U.S. and Canada (850) 683-4094; elsewhere (303) 604-0518

EMAIL: cgw@neodata.com. Please type your full name and the address at which you subscribe (do not send attachments). Subscriptions: The one year (12 issues) subscription rate is $29.97, or $34.97 with CD-ROM. Outside the U.S. add $16.00 per year for surface mail. U.S. funds only. Please allow three to six weeks before receiving your first issue, as well as for any changes to take place on an existing subscription.

BACK ISSUES: Back issues are $8.00 each in the U.S. $10.00 each elsewhere (subject to availability). Prepayment is required. Make your checks payable to Computer Gaming World. Mail your request to: Back Issues, Ziff-Davis Publishing Inc., P.O. Box 53131, Boulder, CO 80322-3131

MAILING LISTS: We sometimes make lists of our customers to mailers of goods and services that may interest you. If you do not wish to receive these mailings, please write to us at: Computer Gaming World, P.O. Box 57167, Boulder, CO 80322-7167

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT
Editor-in-Chief **Jeff Green**
Editor **Ken Brown** (Read Me)
Managing Editor **Dana Jongewaard** (Gamer's Edge)
Technical Editor **William O'Neal** (Hardware)
Reviews Editor **Robert Coffey** (RPG, Strategy)
Previews Editor **Darren Gladstone** (Sports)
Strategies & Tips Editor **Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen** (Action, Features)
Editorial Intern **Di Luo** (CD-ROM)

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Charles Ardai, Mark Asher, T. Byrl Baker, Loyd Case, Tom Chick, Bruce Geryk, John Houlihan, Jeff Lackey, Raphael Liberatore, Thomas L. McDonald

ART DEPARTMENT
Art Director **Rob Schultz**
Associate Art Director **Michael Jennings**

COPY DESK
Copy Chief **Kristen Salvatore**
Copy Editor **Tom Edwards**
Copy Editor **Greg Ford**

PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT
Manufacturing Director **Carlos Lugo**
Art Production Manager **Michele Kellogg-Manousos**
Senior Production Manager **Anne Marie Miguel**
Assistant Production Manager **Teresa Newson**

ZIFF DAVIS GAME GROUP
Editorial Director **John Davison**
Creative Director **Simon Cox**
Business Director **Cathy Bendoff**

HOW TO CONTACT THE EDITORS
To contact any member of the staff: firstname_lastname@ziffdavis.com
Address nonsubscription-related questions and feedback to: *CGW* Editorial, 101 2nd Street, 8th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105. Or you may contact us via e-mail: cgwletters@ziffdavis.com; phone: (415) 357-4900; or editorial fax: (415) 357-4977. Website: www.computergaming.com

ADVERTISING & SALES DEPARTMENT
Group Publisher **Lee Uniacke**
Group Associate Publisher **Stan Taigen**
stan_taigen@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4915
District Sales Representative/
Bay Area Peninsula **Mary Gray**
mary_gray@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8782
Account Executive/
Bay Area Peninsula **Aaron Gallion**
linda_philapil@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-4925
Account Executive/
Southwest Territory **Emily Olman**
emily_olman@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8781
Regional Sales Manager/
Midwest Territory **Marc Callison**
marc_callison@ziffdavis.com (630) 810-4095
Account Executive/
Northwest Territory **Meighan O'Rourke**
meighan_orourke@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4920
Regional Sales Manager/
East Coast Territory **Ian Sinclair**
ian_sinclair@ziffdavis.com (203) 255-4560
Account Executive/
East Coast Territory **Mary Letson**
mary_letson@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8777
Regional Sales Manager/
Key Accounts West **Marci Yamaguchi**
marciy@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4944
Account Executive/
Key Accounts West **Amy Mishra**
amy_mishra@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8780
Senior Marketing Manager and
Creative Director **Rey Ledda**
rey_ledda@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8775
Marketing Coordinator **Wayne Shiu**
wayne_shiu@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8248
Advertising Coordinator **Tipler Ubbelohde**
tipler_ubbelohde@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4930
Sales Assistant **Kristeen Laut**
kristeen_laut@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8778
Sales Assistant **Amanda Nelson**
amanda_nelson@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8783

HOW TO CONTACT ADVERTISING & SALES
Address inquiries to: *CGW* Advertising, 101 2nd Street, 8th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105; phone: (415) 547-8778; fax: (415) 357-4999.
Founder **Russell Sipe**

Enter The Matrix © 2002 Infogrames, Inc. under license from Warner Bros. All rights reserved. The Atari trademark and logo are the property of Infogrames. Windows is either a registered trademark or trademark of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Manufactured and marketed by Infogrames, Inc. New York, NY. Microsoft, Xbox, and the Xbox logos are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Nintendo, Nintendo GameCube and the Official Seal are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2001 Nintendo. All Rights Reserved.

MATRIX, ENTER THE MATRIX, characters, names and all related indicia are trademarks of and © Warner Bros. WB LOGO: TM & © Warner Bros. (602)

Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information

TOM CHICK

Tom Chick (not his real name) is a mild-mannered office

dons orange tights to do battle with his arch nemesis, the

where he donates game reviews to the homeless. He is

rumored to live in Los Angeles with his wife and their two

Pomeranians, one of whom is blind.

BRUCE DENYK

After a brief career as an investment banker, Bruce decided he'd really like to be a surgeon. He is an MD/PhD student, concurrently enrolled in medical school and working on a PhD in biochemistry. His latest projects are synaptogenesis in a rat cerebellar neuron model, and blowing up Russian tanks in *Combat Mission 2*. Check out his battle for supremacy against Tom Chick in Gamer's Edge.

DI LUO

Since spotting Scooter's mug in this rag, Di knew he had to follow in his fellow Asian's footsteps. He got a useless job," and took an internship at *CGW*. He now spends his office with a bat.

ARNOLD TIOSEJO

Our hardware photographer likes to think of his San Francisco studio as a playground; as a result, he's got a space filled with hobbies to stimulate artist-brain activities. His choice of subjects is based on things he is passionate about. To get a glimpse into his head, click on the spinning windmills on the passion page of his website, www.tiosejo.com. See his work this and every month in our Tech section.

ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA

Robert F. Callahan Chairman and Chief Executive Officer

Bart W. Catalane Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer

Tom McGrade Senior Executive Vice President, Publishing Operations

Stephen D. Moylan Executive Vice President

Michael J. Miller Executive Vice President and Editorial Director; Editor-in-Chief, *PC Magazine*

Gregory Barton Executive Vice President, General Counsel & Secretary

Jasmine Alexander Senior Vice President, Technology and Sales Operations

Dale Irwin Senior Vice President, Finance

Charles Mast Senior Vice President, Circulation

Sloan Seymour Senior Vice President, Publishing Director, *Baseline*

Dale Strang Senior Vice President, Game Group

Jason Young Senior Vice President, Ziff Davis Internet

Ken Beach Vice President, Corporate Sales

Tim Castelli Vice President, Publisher, *PC Magazine*

Charles Lee Vice President, Integrated Media

Aimee D. Levine Vice President, Corporate Communications

Jim Louderback Vice President, Editor-in-Chief, Internet

Eric Lundquist Vice President, Editor-in-Chief, *eWEEK*

Bill Machrone Vice President, Editorial Development

David Mullen Vice President, Controller

Beth Repeta Vice President, Human Resources

Tom Steinert-Threlkeld Vice President, Editor-in-Chief, *Baseline*

Stephen Sutton Vice President, Internet Audience Development

Stephen Veith Vice President, Publisher, *CIO Insight*

Carlos Lugo Senior Director, Manufacturing

Christin Lawson Director, International

Contact anyone on this masthead via e-mail using first name_last name@ziffdavis.com

PERMISSIONS

COPYRIGHT © 2003 ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA. ALL R GHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. FOR PERMISSION TO REUSE MATERIAL IN THIS PUBLICATION (OR ON THIS WEBSITE) OR TO USE OUR LOGO, CONTACT ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA'S RIGHTS AND PERMISSIONS MANAGER, OLGA GONOPOLSKY, ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA INC., 28 EAST 28TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10016; TEL: 212-503-5438; FAX: 212-503-5420; EMAIL: OLGA_GONOPOLSKY@ZIFFDAVIS.COM. FOR REPRINTS, CONTACT REPRINT MANAGEMENT SERVICES AT 800 290-5460.

Audit Bureau of Circulations Member ABC AUDITED

SEQUEL TO THE COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATION OF THE YEAR

IL-2 STURMOVIK

FORGOTTEN BATTLES

WWII 1941-1944

NEW MISSIONS.
NEW FLYABLE AIRCRAFT.
NEW DYNAMIC CAMPAIGN.

"...the most visually stunning [illegible] fluid representation of aerial combat ever packaged up in a PC flight simulation."

Andy Mahood, PC [illegible]

Over 85 flyable aircraft including the P-47 and German Stuka

New special effects

[illegible] up to 32 players for [illegible] cooperative play

TEEN T Violence

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

2 COSET

Play It On ubi.com

www.IL2sturmovik.com

©2003 Ubi Soft Entertainment. All Rights Reserved. Ubi Soft, the Ubi Soft logo and IL-2 Forgotten Battles are trademarks of Ubi Soft Entertainment in the US and/or other countries

1C COMPANY 1C:MADDOX GAMES

Ubi Soft

[illegible]

Letters

Whisper sweet nothings in our ears at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Coming Up Next: Gallagher

With the passing of your last page from Jeff Green to [redacted] column something predictable like "Coffey Break."

Andreas (Andy) Halm

Robert thanks you for the comparison. Jeff does not. By the way, does this make Wil Sammy Davis Jr.?

Spoiler alert!

Green, you really did it this time. I know people have called you many things in this magazine, but they're nothing compared to what you really are: a SPOILER. As we both know, this is the ultimate badge of dishonor in gamedom. I recently bought *No One Lives Forever 2* and opened your January 2003 issue to see if you guys thought it was as great as I did, and what do I see? A picture of Armstrong and a big robot or whatever with the caption "Armstrong, now on Cate's side, fights a super soldier." What? Armstrong and Cate team up? Gee, you know, I kinda would've enjoyed finding that out for myself. Of all the zillion possible non-spoiling-yet-informative pics you could've used, why did you HAVE to choose this one? To put it gently, you completely screwed up. I'm disappointed in you. Keep writing, though.

John Shin

Jeff Green responds: Hey, at least I didn't tell you that Rosebud was her sled.

How (not) to be letter of the month

So, what does it take to become the Letter of the Month? January issue: Someone takes a crap in the bathroom while reading your magazine and discovers how entertaining it is. Everyone does this, don't they? December issue: Someone doesn't buy a game just because you gave a bad review to it or even a hint that the game wasn't worth a true gamer's hard drive space. Well, I don't buy those games either, and I can tell you that a lot of other people don't as well. But this guy wrote about it, so I guess it makes it special. Now let's skip to October, which was my favorite. Some hyper kid just LOVES your magazine, writes about it, and puts an exclamation mark at the end of every sentence, and what happens? He gets Letter of the Month! Why? I guess because he wrote about it! So, what's your guys' secret criteria for letter of the month, 'cause I want mine in that nice sexy blue box with a cool picture, and just knowing to write about something isn't helping me.

Michael Lovall

Well, you could start by not bitching about everyone else's letters.

Scorched Earth first

My January 2003 issue just arrived in the mail today, and of course the first thing I did was flip to see what was opposite the back cover. Greenspeak was my favorite column in the magazine, so I was a little bitter last month to find that it wouldn't be appearing anymore. But after reading Scorched Earth, I felt all guilty...darn you, Robert Coffey! Darn you to heck! Seriously though, looking forward to more of your "total fiasco."

Maggie

Schlonghold watch

I was truly saddened to learn that I have to wait until Q5 of 2003 for *Schlonghold* to hit the shelves [Pipeline, January 2003]. That's an eternity for fans of the genre. Now, instead of playing *Schlonghold* this Christmas, I have to keep on playing *Wankerwrap 2: The Obsession*. It can get tedious and it always ends the same way, yet time after time, it manages to satisfy.

Brian Fishkin

Funny how? Like a clown? How the $#@% are we funny?

I just finished reading my January 2003 issue cover to cover. I have to say you are all the funniest people I have ever had the honor of reading. I challenge anyone to

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL SLACK

"I felt all guilty...darn you, Robert Coffey! Darn you to heck!"

湾岸
The Future Of Illegal Street Racing
MIDNIGHT CLUB II
LOS ANGELES / PARIS / TOKYO
Meet the world's most notorious drivers on the streets of LA, Paris, and Tokyo.
Choose from the latest performance enhanced vehicles and compete to make a name for yourself.
There are no rules - drive anywhere in the city. Find the fastest route to win.
The Midnight Club is now open to motorbikers. Take advantage of the speed and control.
"(An) insane urban racing experience... it's ultra-illegal stuff that you've dreamed of doing." - PSM DECEMBER 2002
TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB Violence
PC CD ROM
LIVE
PlayStation.2
ONLINE BROADBAND ONLY
WWW.ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/MIDNIGHTCLUB2

"PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Online play requires Internet connection and Network Adaptor for PlayStation®2 (sold separately). The Online icon is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, and the Xbox logos are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft. Rockstar Games, Rockstar San Diego and the R* logo are registered trademarks of Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association. Copyright 2002. All rights reserved.

MAIL BITES

Question: If *The Mystery of the Mumbling Man* got "Nothing. Absolutely nothing" right [Reviews, December 2002], why did it get ONE WHOLE STAR?
Andrew E.

What is up with your January 2003 CD slipcase cover? Is James Bond a fey Elf in disguise?
Adam_xx

Will you shut up about *Age of Mythology* being "the last RTS"? SHUT UP.
Kyle Lamprecht

Oops, I bounced a check... sorry guys. I hope Scooter still gets his paycheck this week.
A.C.

"Cancel your subscription, disconnect your TV, and board up your house."

name another magazine (gaming or not) that you can read for three straight hours and laugh out loud over and over again. If I ever hit the lottery, I just want to come hang out with you guys while you turn out the best magazine in print. I don't read for the good reviews, I read for the bad. Subscriber until the end—or until another *Morrowind* comes along and I forget to eat.

Lavlin Falomere

Outside the Boxleitner

Great feature on the upcoming *Tron* game. The only problem is that the film example of Alan Bradley is actually a picture of RAM, the trusty sidekick played by none other than Dan Shor. (You may remember him from films like *Strange Invaders* and *Mike's Murder*.) I've got the official 1982 *Tron Movie Storybook* sitting in front of me with the exact same picture on page 25, so I think I'm correct.

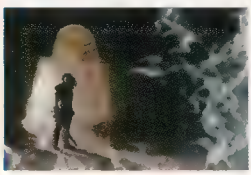
And no, I am not a *Tron* geek. My heart belongs to *The Last Starfighter*.

Eric Wittbrodt

Our one chance to put a photo of acting god Bruce Boxleitner in *CGW*, and we blow it. The gods weep.

Arx Fatality?

Could we have another *System Shock 2* on our hands? As quietly as *Arx Fatalis* came to us, just as quietly the developer (Arkane Studios) may leave us, mostly due to lack publicity for the game. Here is one of the few games that grabbed me hard enough to stop me from putting it down before completing it. Support from the developer is great. I received e-mail responses to inquiries within minutes of their dispatch, from the CEO himself!



It was a pleasure playing a first-person RPG with a slight tilt away from combat and more toward exploration and puzzle solving. I encourage the adventure-hearted first-person RPGer to add this title to his collection and promote the "second coming." It would be a tragedy to lose a developer with such potential so soon.

Gary W. Hugo

We agree with you Gary. See our review on page 94.

In defense of *America's Army*

In response to Mr. Ronald Phair's letter, "*America's Army*: Evil?" [January 2003], Mr. Phair needs to broaden his little circle of "gamer friends," because he doesn't have the slightest idea of what the "gaming community" is all about, and he certainly doesn't speak for "us."

I'm all for the Army using this game for recruiting. It's just a more interesting form of publicity and advertising than the standard media of TV commercials and print ads. Playing this game doesn't hypnotize young people and force them to march down to the recruiter's office any more than TV commercials do.

He has a perverse concept of evil as well. The United States Armed Forces are not evil. They are highly disciplined and motivated young people who are willing to put their lives on the line to defend their homes and loved ones. Just keep in mind, Mr. Phair, that you are the benefactor of the sacrifices made by a .ot of noble men and women who were brave enough to defend our freedoms.

Cancel your subscription, disconnect your TV, and board up your house, Mr. Phair. It's a violent world and you are not strong enough to face reality. Stick to *Tetris* and *Bejeweled*; you might be unduly influenced by the "evil" in other games.

Bruce Zimmerman

Let's hope that this game does what it was designed to do and recruits people into the military. Remember that without a military, lazy cowards like the person posting that letter wouldn't be able to speak so openly against such things without retribution. Be thankful people have the balls to stand up and defend their country so even cowards like this guy can live free.

-=VOLT=-

Department of korekshuns

In your January Read Me section, there is a preview of *Warhammer Online*. You said *Warhammer* is "a popular European pen-and-paper RPG," but there are three things wrong with that sentence:

1. You stated it's only popular in Europe (It's popular in North America too!).

2. It says "pen-and-paper," but in reality there is no pen or paper involved (except the rules).

3. You said it's an RPG. *Warhammer* is not an RPG like *Dungeons & Dragons*. It is where two large armies duke it out. In fact, the game is like a tabletop version of *Medieval: Total War*, only with Orcs, Lizardmen, Undead, and Skaven.

Tom Dabrowsk

The UGM and drag racing

Somebody get Wil a coffee so he can wake up. His "Ultimate" gaming machine was leaving artifacts AND crashed twice [Tech, January 2003]? For $4,000 I expect a fast AND stable system. Who cares that you got a few frames per second more than me if you can't finish a game against me? You may not even see the difference in frames between the rigs, but you'll notice the crash. You found the fastest qualifier, not the fastest racer. I'll take fast and stable any day.

Gary

While I agree with Wil O'Neal that the Ultimate Gaming Machine competition is a drag race, I have to disagree with giving the top honor to a machine that showed poor stability and crashed games. (Admittedly, the crash couldn't be replicated.) If this really were a drag race, very few if any drivers would want to get into such a machine. Sure, it's fast. On the first lap down the track. After the blower belt flies off and the engine explodes like a small nova, it won't be so fast, and the cost to replace or repair all those parts would be very high.

While speed should be a very heavily weighted factor in these tests, stability over the long haul has to play a role. It's all well and good to have a screamin' rig, but if the videocard needs replacing every few months, let alone the CPU or RAM, it really isn't all that great a deal.

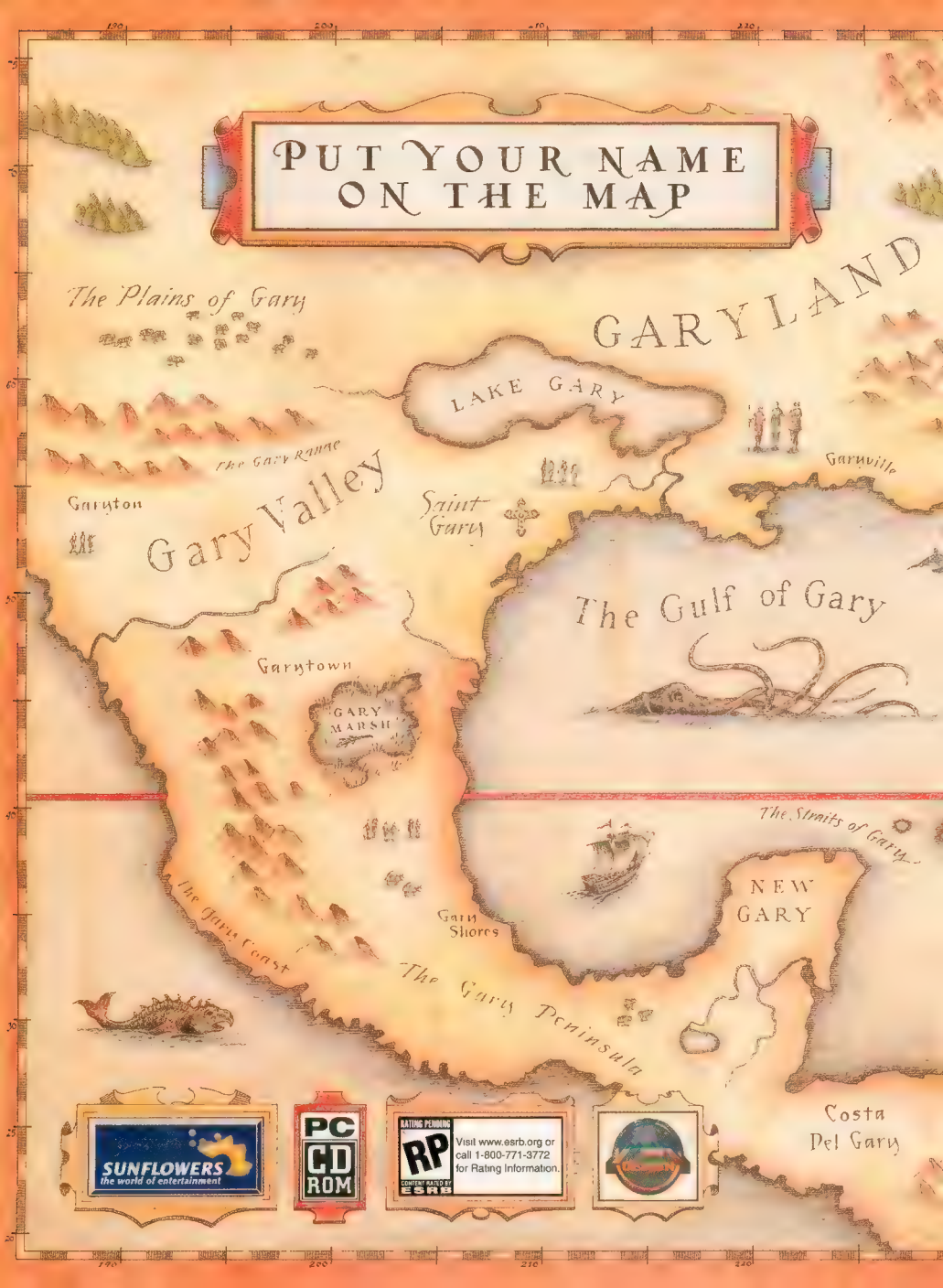
Matthew Wilbur

© 2003 PriceGrabber.com

Find all your favorite products under one roof—yours.

PriceGrabber

Comparison Shopping Beyond Compare.


PUT YOUR NAME ON THE MAP
The Plains of Gary
GARYLAND
LAKE GARY
Garville
The Gary Range
Gary Valley
Garyton
Saint Gary
The Gulf of Gary
Garytown
GARY MARSH
The Straits of Gary
NEW GARY
The Gary Coast
Gary Shores
The Gary Peninsula
Costa Del Gary
SUNFLOWERS
the world of entertainment
PC CD ROM
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information.

North Gary

Point Gary

Mount Gary

The Sea of Gary

Port Gary

Gary Islands

Boca Gary

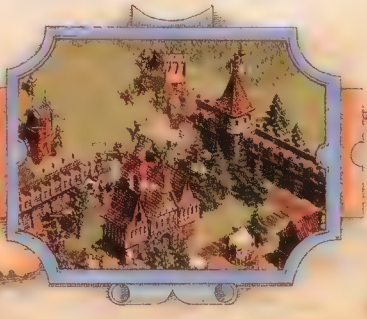
CAPE GARY

Isle of Gary

Newfound Gary

Farmount

The Bay of Gary



Discover and lay claim to the New World. *Build* your own empire, or *conquer* those who came before you. The year is 1503 A.D. The year you make history. 1503AD.COM

EA GAMES

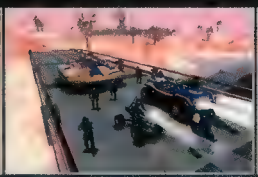
Challenge Everything

THOUSANDS WILL FIGHT.

THOUSANDS WILL DIE.

YOU MAY NEVER KILL THE SAME PERSON TWICE.

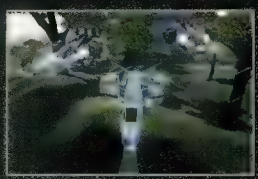
New Conglomerate forces overpower enemy defenses and begin their assault on the Vanu Sovereignty base.



A New Conglomerate squad of infantry and armor prepares to reinforce their Empire on Searhus, where hundreds of friendlies and enemies are presently waging war.

Terran Republic soldiers lay siege to the barracks in a New Conglomerate facility, while squadmates begin the process of capturing the facility.

Strap it on and lock n' load as you fight for one of three empires, battling across 10 huge continents and numerous front lines.



Swift Vanu Sovereignty flyers advance on a Terran Republic base, pounding enemy ground forces attempting to run for cover.

PlanetSide™

www.station.com/planetside

From dusk till dawn, the battles for planet Auraxis™ rage on, as strongholds, front lines and captured territories continuously change hands.

PlanetSide, the Vanguard, For Land, For Power, Auraxis, and all other PlanetSide slogans and placenames, are trademarks of Sony Online Entertainment Inc. SOE and the SOE logo are registered trademarks of Sony Online Entertainment Inc.
©2003 Sony Online Entertainment Inc. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association. All rights reserved. All other trademarks or trademarks are properties of their respective owners.

CHOOSE YOUR ALLEGIANCE. CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON.

AND JOIN THE MOST INTENSE ONLINE WAR EVER.

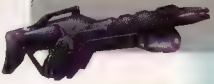
THE NEW CONGLOMERATE

VANU SOVEREIGNTY

TERRAN REPUBLIC

JACKHAMMER

LASHER



CHAINGUN

VANGUARD

THRESHER

PROWLER

For more information on each empire's capabilities, armor, weapons and vehicles visit www.station.com/planetside

SOE
SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

TEEN
T
Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Game Experience May Change During Online Play.

FOR LAND.
FOR POWER.
FOREVER.

WE ARE
FREEDOM'S ANSWER TO FEAR.
OUR DUTY BEGINS WHEN NEGOTIATIONS END
FOR WE DO NOT BARGAIN WITH TERROR.
WE STALK IT, CORNER IT, TAKE AIM,
AND KILL IT.
WE ARE TEAM RAINBOW.

SQUAD-BASED COUNTER-TERROR

The father of all tactical shooters returns, in an all-new game locked and loaded to change the face of action gaming. AGAIN. Advance to a new level of gaming realism with new high-tech gear to hunt the Tangos and 57 weapons to take them down. Experience unmatched graphical realism and high velocity multiplayer action powered by next generation Unreal™ technology. We wrote the book on tactical squad-based combat. Now we're rewriting it. Study up.

MATURE M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Violence

Ubi Soft
www.ubi.com

PC CD ROM

Play it on ubi.com

© 2000 Red Storm Entertainment, Inc. Red Storm and Red Storm Entertainment are trademarks of Red Storm Entertainment, Inc. Red Storm Entertainment, Inc. is a Ubi Soft Entertainment company. All Rights Reserved. Rainbow Six is a trademark of Red Storm Entertainment, Inc. Raven Shield is a trademark of Red Storm Entertainment. Unreal Engine is a trademark of Epic Games Inc.

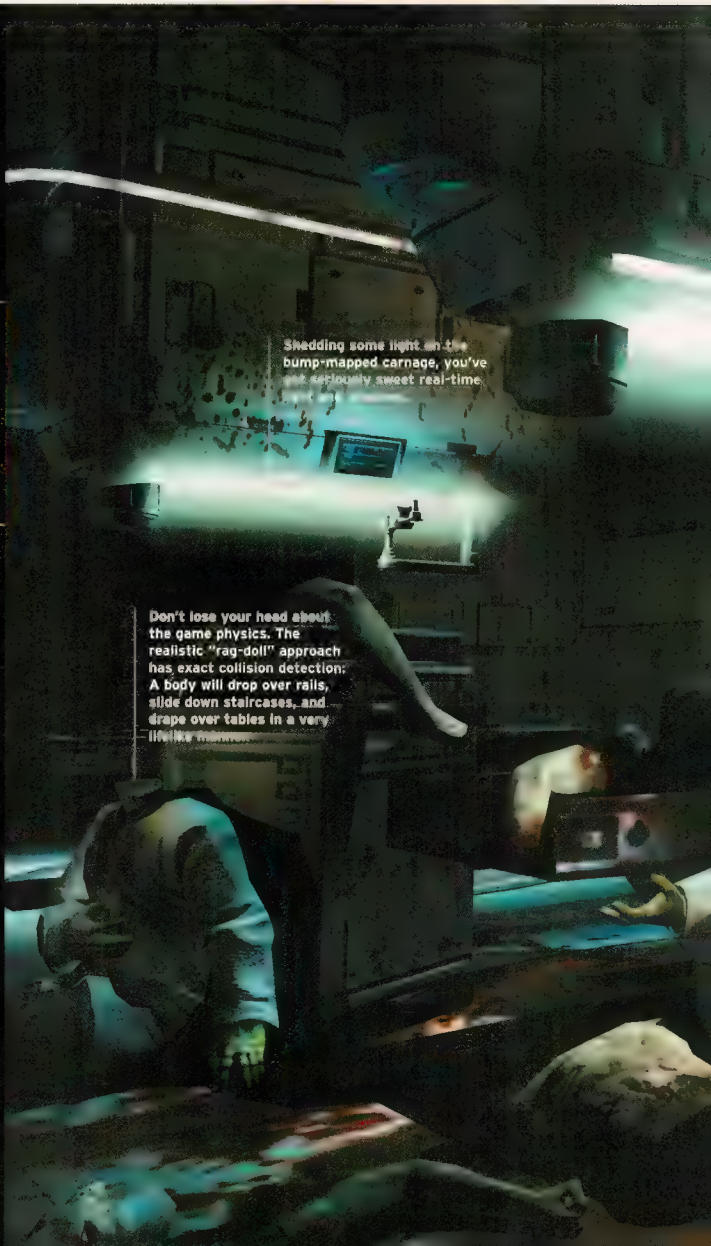
Tom Clancy's
RAINBOW SIX 3
RAVEN SHIELD
www.raven-shield.com

Loading...

The hottest shots of the best new games

DOOM III

Every so often, we like to spotlight a game that has subtlety. Take this submission from Activision. Notice the dark hues in the color palate and how well they convey that feeling of bleak desperation. And see how the blood-splattered chainsaw in the foreground contrasts with the lights to accentuate mangled bodies? All right, enough of that. As this screenshot shows, *Doom III* is looking gruesomely gorgeous. Believe it or not, this is an in-game shot. It may be a first-person shooter, but it's starting to look more like a space-age *Resident Evil* on steroids. It goes without saying that we can't wait for it to show up in the second half of 2003.

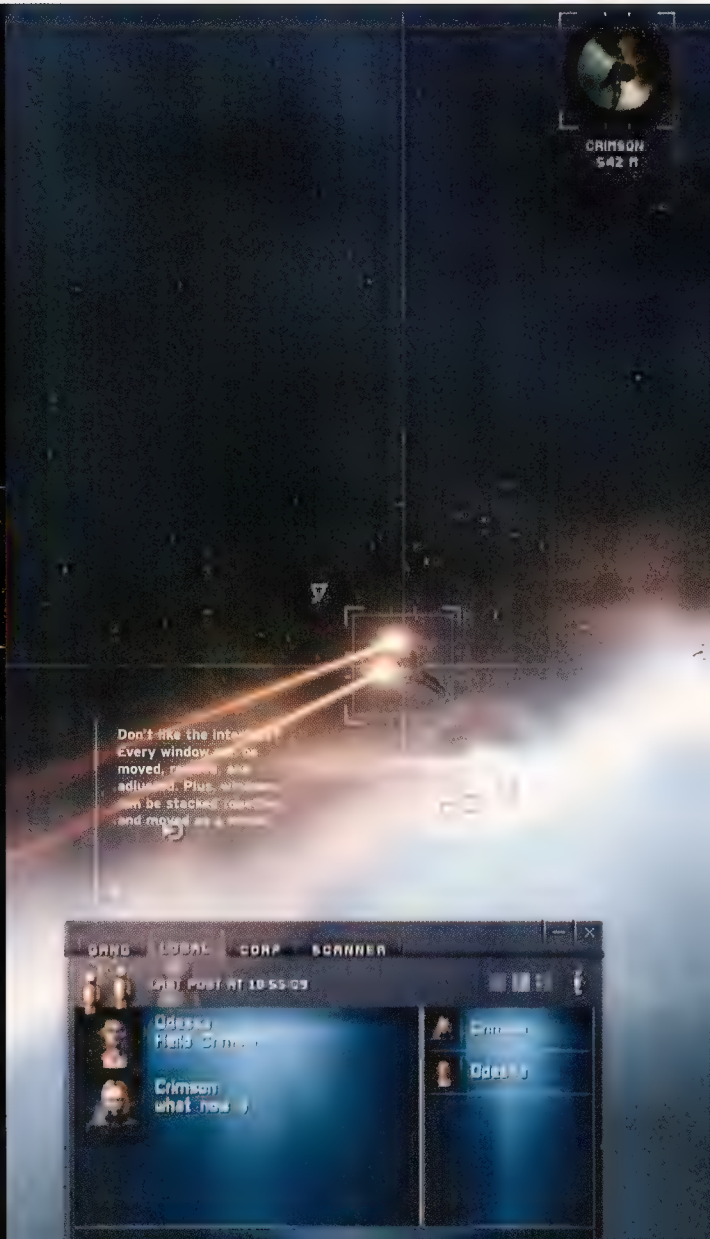

Shedding some light on the bump-mapped carnage, you've got seriously sweet real-time
Don't lose your head about the game physics. The realistic "rag-doll" approach has exact collision detection: A body will drop over rails, slide down staircases, and drape over tables in a very

They're baaaack! Chainsaws are one of the in-game weapons and a staple of horror movies.

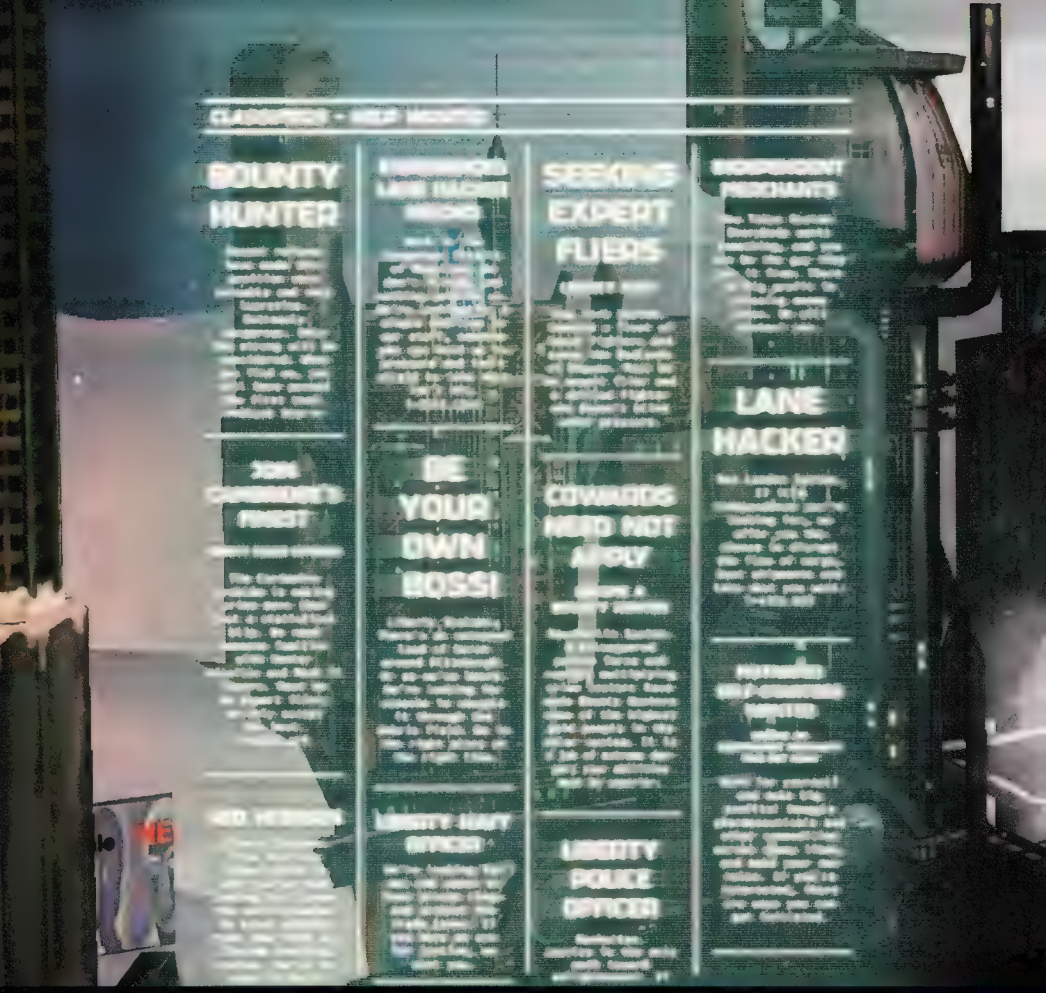
If you don't see this guy sneaking up behind you, at least you'll hear the saw grinding into your spine in full Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound.

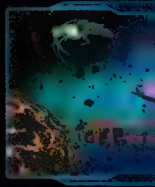
EVE: THE SECOND GENESIS

Don't bother trying to compare *Eve* with *Earth & Beyond*. Where Westwood Studios' MMORPG is like *EverQuest*...in...space, *Eve* is more about building cartels and blowing the hell out of other players. The focus here is on player-versus-player space combat. The one thing that's sure to keep us entertained? Blasting a ship apart, grabbing the ejected pilot, and either ransoming the body or killing him to harvest his biomass and create your own clone. *Eve* should be ready by the time you read this.



20,000 years in the future, corporate wars rage among five offshoots of the human race. Create huge corporations and buy stations, planets, or even solar systems.
You're looking at a Bantam-class Caldari frigate, one of the 80-odd ships in *Eve*.
SPEED 115 m/s





TEEN T Violence CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

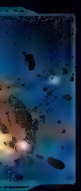
digitalANVIL

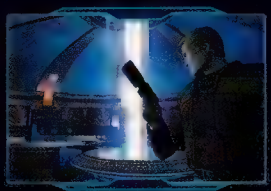
Microsoft game studios

THE UNIVERSE. APPLY WITHIN.

Experience a vast, open-ended universe filled with an infinite number of adventures. You are the freelancer Edison Trent, an intergalactic jack-of-all-trades. Your mission: whatever you want.

©2003 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Microsoft, the Microsoft Game Studios logo, Digital Anvil, and Freelancer are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries. Other products and company





Become a smuggler or a ruthless space thug, a naval hero or a trader. Dodge through asteroid fields while piloting elite fighters. The action is endless as you make your way through 48 known star systems. Greed, morality, compassion, anger... whatever motivates you, the dynamic universe will respond. Take the first step. The universe is waiting.

FREELANCER™

The universe of possibility.

http://www.microsoft.com/games/freelancer

Other products mentioned herein may be trademarks of their respective owners. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association.

Great power. Blazing speed.
You'll have 3D villains surrendering in no time.

Select Dell desktops feature high performance Intel® Pentium® 4 Processors.

Click or call for our latest pricing and promotions.

Excellent for conquering strange new worlds or just escaping from this one. Dell offers a wide variety of desktops and notebooks that come fully equipped with the power, speed and high performance to take your PC experience to new levels. When you order from Dell, you'll get exactly what you want and need to make a PC that's uniquely yours. Since Dell uses high-quality, reliable technology, like Intel® Pentium® 4 Processors with awesome performance for gaming, music, digital photos, and beyond, you know you're getting a high-quality, reliable PC. And, as always, it comes backed by award-winning service and support available 24/7, 365 days a year. Best of all, when you order direct, you get the right PC at the right price. So go online or call today. We'll show you how easy it is to score a great PC.

Dell | Home Notebooks

Inspiron™ 2650 Notebook

Mobile Gaming Starter

- Mobile Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor-M at 1.80GHz
- 15" XGA TFT Display
- 384MB DDR PC2100 SDRAM
- 30GB* Ultra ATA Hard Drive
- 24x CD-RW/DVD Combo Drive with Roxio's Easy CD Creator™
- 16MB DDR NVIDIA® GeForce2 Go™ 100 AGP 4x Graphics
- Sound Blaster® Compatible
- 59WHr Li-ion Battery (8 cell)
- Internal Modem and NIC included
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- WordPerfect® Productivity Pack with Quicken™ New User Edition

$1479 or as low as **$45**/mo*
E-VALUE Code: 16450-D80214m

Make this your perfect PC:

- 512MB DDR PC2100 SDRAM, add $100
- 40GB* Performance Hard Drive, add $90
- 32MB DDR NVIDIA® GeForce2 Go™ 200 AGP 4x Graphics, add $99
- Custom Leather Case, add $99

Inspiron™ 4150 Notebook

Thin and Light Gamer's Dream

- Mobile Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor-M at 1.90GHz
- 14.1" XGA TFT Display
- 512MB DDR PC2100 SDRAM
- 40GB* Performance Hard Drive
- 24x CD-RW/DVD Combo Drive with Roxio's Easy CD Creator™
- 32MB DDR ATI® MOBILITY™ RADEON™ 7500 AGP 4x Graphics
- Sound Blaster® Compatible Sound with Wavetable
- 66WHr Li-ion Battery with ExpressCharge™ Technology (8 cell)
- Internal Modem and NIC included
- Dolby® Headphone Solution
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition, Microsoft® Works Suite

$1899 or as low as **$57**/mo*
E-VALUE Code: 16450-D80218m

Make this your perfect PC:

- Mobile Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor-M at 2GHz, add $50
- Windows® XP Professional, add $79
- Burlwood Colored Display Back and Palm Rest Inserts, add $29
- Notebook Backpack, add $79

Inspiron™ 8200 Notebook

Ultimate Mobile Gaming Machine

- Mobile Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor-M at 2.40GHz
- 15" UltraSharp™ UXGA TFT Display
- 512MB DDR PC2100 SDRAM
- 60GB* Performance Hard Drive
- 24x CD-RW/DVD Combo Drive with Roxio's Easy CD Creator
- ATI® MOBILITY™ RADEON™ 9000 64MB DDR 4x AGP Graphics
- Sound Blaster® Compatible Sound with Wavetable
- 66WHr Li-Ion Battery with ExpressCharge™ Technology (8 cell)
- Internal Modem and NIC Included
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Professional, Microsoft® Works Suite

$2779 or as low as **$84**/mo*
E-VALUE Code: 16450-D80227m

- Microsoft® Office XP Small Business, add $114
- 64MB USB Memory Key, add $59
- External Harman Kardon HK-395 Speakers with Subwoofer, add $59
- Kenneth Cole Leather Case by Dell, add $249

Dell | Home Desktops

Dimension™ 4550 Desktop

Superior Performance, Smart Value

- Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor at 2.66GHz with 533MHz Front Side Bus and 512K L2 Cache
- 512MB DDR SDRAM at 266MHz
- NEW 60GB* Ultra ATA/100 Hard Drive (7200 RPM)
- 19" (18.0" v.i.s., 24dpi M992 Monitor
- NEW 128MB DDR ATI® RADEON™ 9700 TX Graphics Card with TV-Out and DVI
- 16x DVD ROM Drive
- Sound Blaster Live! 5.1 Digital Sound Card
- Altec Lansing® ADA745 4.1 Surround Sound Speakers with Subwoofer
- 56K* PCI Telephony Modem
- Integrated Intel® PRO 10/100 Ethernet
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- WordPerfect® Productivity Pack with Quicken® New User Edition

$1549 or as low as **$47**/mo*
E-VALUE Code: 16450-D50215m

Make this your perfect PC:

- NEW 128MB DDR ATI® RADEON™ 9700 Pro Graphics Card with TV-Out and DVI, add $180
- 21" (19.9" v.i.s., 24AGt P1130 FD Trinitron® Monitor, add $390
- 1GB DDR SDRAM at 266MHz, add $200
- NEW 120GB* Ultra ATA/100 Hard Drive (7200 RPM), add $110

Dimension™ 8250 Desktop

Cutting Edge Technology

- Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor at 2.66GHz with 533MHz Front Side Bus and 512K L2 Cache
- 512MB PC1066 RDRAM
- NEW 60GB* Ultra ATA/100 Hard Drive (7200 RPM)
- 19" (18.0" v.i.s., 24dpi M992 Monitor
- NEW 128MB DDR ATI® RADEON™ 9700 TX Graphics Card with TV-Out and DVI
- 16x DVD ROM Drive
- 40x/10x/40x CD-RW Drive with Roxio's Easy CD Creator® (2nd bay)
- Sound Blaster Live! 5.1 Digital Sound Card
- Altec Lansing® ADA745 4.1 Surround Sound Speakers with Subwoofer
- 56K* PCI Telephony Modem
- Integrated Intel® PRO 10/100 Ethernet
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- WordPerfect® Productivity Pack with Quicken® New User Edition

$1999 or as low as **$60**/mo*
E-VALUE Code: 16450-D50219m

Make this your perfect PC:

- 1GB PC1066 RDRAM, add $420
- NEW 120GB* Ultra ATA/100 Hard Drive (7200 RPM), add $110
- NEW 128MB DDR ATI® RADEON™ 9700 Pro Graphics Card with TV-Out and DVI, add $180

Dimension™ 8250 Desktop

Extreme Gaming Machine

- Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor at 3.06GHz with HT Technology
- 512MB PC1066 RDRAM
- NEW 200GB* Ultra ATA/100 Hard Drive (7200 RPM) with DataBurst™ Cache
- 19" (18.0" v.i.s., 24dpi M992 Monitor
- NEW 128MB DDR ATI® RADEON™ 9700 Pro Graphics Card with TV-Out and DVI
- 16x DVD ROM Drive
- NEW 48x/24x/48x CD-RW Drive with Roxio's Easy CD Creator® (2nd bay)
- Sound Blaster Live! 5.1 Digital Sound Card
- Altec Lansing® ADA745 4.1 Surround Sound Speakers with Subwoofer
- 56K* PCI Telephony Modem
- Integrated Intel® PRO 10/100 Ethernet
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- WordPerfect® Productivity Pack with Quicken® New User Edition

$2899 or as low as **$87**/mo*
E-VALUE Code: 16450-D50228m

Make this your perfect PC:

- NEW 4x DVD+RW/+R* Drive with CD-RW including Roxio's Easy CD Creator® and Sonic™ MyDVD™ (2nd bay), add $140
- 1GB PC1066 RDRAM, add $420
- 21" (19.9" v.i.s., 24AG) P1130 FD Trinitron® Monitor, add $390
- Altec Lansing® THX Certified ADA995 Surround Sound 5.1 Speaker System with Dell™ Enhanced Multimedia Keyboard, add $170

Standard Features

Each DELL system shown has a number of standard features, including:

- Dell Picture Studio Image Expert Standard Edition
- Dell Jukebox Powered by MUSICMATCH®
- 6 Months of MSN® Powered by Dell™ Internet Access Included*
- Dimension Desktops shown here include 1-Year Limited Warranty*, 1 Year At Home Service Offering*, Keyboard and Mouse
- Inspiron Notebooks shown here include 1-Year Limited Warranty* 1-Year Mail-In Service Offering

Software & Peripherals

- Canon® MultiPASS F80 Multifunction (Prints, Scans, Copies, and Faxes), $399
- Kodak EasyShare™ LS443 Digital Camera with Dock, $499
- Belkin® Home Office 350 VA UPS Surge, $49
- Detto Intellimover V3.0 Migration Software and Parallel Cable, $50
- Extreme Gaming Bundle, $90
- Roller Coaster Tycoon 2 Game, $30
- Logitech® Wingman Extreme Digital 3D Joystick, $30
- Gravis Gamepad Pro, $15

Service & Support

Upgrade from Standard Warranty and Service Offering to:
3-Year Limited Warranty*, 3-Year At-Home Service Offering*

- Dimension 4550, 8250, $159
- Inspiron 2650, $179
- Inspiron 4150, 8200, $299

Accidents Happen!
Protect yourself with CompleteCare™ Accidental Damage Protection*.

- Dimension 1-Year, $39
- Dimension 3-Year, $99
- Inspiron 1-Year, $79
- Inspiron 3-Year, $149

The Perfect PC at the perfect price. Easy as DELL™

Click www.dell4me.com/cgw Call 1-800-822-3781

Dell recommends Microsoft® Windows® XP Professional for Mobile Computing

*MSN Powered by Dell Telephone access (call your phone co for details) and other surcharges for access may apply. Must register within 30 days of invoice and accept MSN powered by Dell Terms of Service. Yo... service period. You may cancel service at any time. Offer valid for new customers only in U.S. households and must be over 18 years old with major credit card. Limited time offer.

Pricing/Availability ... Limited Warranty: ... PURCHASE PLAN. Dell Preferred Account. ... DVD+RW Drives: ... Hard Drives. ... 56K Modem ... Service. ... CompleteCare ... Not available for Dell Home Sales customers. ... CA, IL, NV. Not available to Large Purchase Program customers. ... service contracts.htm. **Trademark/Copyright Notices:** ... the United States and other countries. Microsoft, MSN and Windows are registered trademarks of Microsoft Corporation. ©2002 2003 Dell Computer Corporation. All rights reserved.

VALUE

Keep your E-VALUE CODE handy! It's the easiest way to find and build your perfect PC when you decide to order

Read Me

The opposite of reality TV Edited by Ken Brown

Jaw-dropping scripted events helped make *Medal of Honor* an obvious action game nominee.

RECAP

And the Nominees for Games of the Year Are...

With so many outstanding games, this year's competition will be the toughest yet By Ken Brown

But *Medal of Honor* faces tough competition from *Grand Theft Auto III*.

INSIDE

DEVASTATION Fight the Man in this gritty *Unreal*-powered FPS. **Page 34**

5, 10, 15 *CGW*'s golden days of yore? Ha, we say. **Page 34**

SEA DOGS II Set sea in the swashbuckling sequel about seamen. **Page 37**

McCLOUD A special two-page edition of Discovering Games. **Page 38**

***Battlefield 1942*'s brilliant design achieved all of its multiplayer objectives.**

The trickle of games with huge, open-ended worlds has turned into a river.

After a disappointing 2001, 2002 turned out to be a banner year for computer gamers. Last year at this time, there was no clear-cut Game of the Year, and several categories were weaker than usual. In 2001, we nominated only two RPGs: *Anachronox* and *Wizardry 8* (which won). Pretty stinko year for role-players. This year, you've got *Morrowind*, *Neverwinter Nights*, *Dungeon Siege*, and *Icewind Dale II* all competing for the prize. You could quibble with *Neverwinter*'s single-player game, but its unprecedented ability to let users create their own adventures will guarantee its popularity for years.

In action games, there's an even greater embarrassment of riches. 2002 was the year of *Grand Theft Auto III*, *Medal of Honor*, *No One Lives Forever 2*, *Hitman 2*, *Unreal Tournament 2003*, and *Battlefield 1942*. OK, smart guy, you decide which is the best of that crowded field. In another year, any one of those titles could have been the overall Game of the Year. This year, they're just titles in one category.

And it goes on: This year produced a bumper crop of fantastic strategy games, including *Freedom Force*, *WarCraft III*, *Age of Mythology*, *Warlords Battlecry II*, *Age of Wonders II*, and *Medieval: Total War*. In multiplayer, we face more tough decisions with *Battlefield 1942*, *America's Army*, *Unreal Tournament 2003*, *Age of Mythology*, and *The Sims Online*.

Once we've debated the highs and lows in these categories, we've still got the toughest decision of all: Game of the Year. Will it be *GTA3*, *Freedom Force*, *Battlefield 1942*, *Medal of Honor*, or something unexpected like last year's *Operation Flashpoint*? We won't know until we've had our customary day-long debate, and Robert Coffey has devoured a box of Altoids while whipsawing us with reasons for recognizing dark horses, redoing the categories, and making sure we do an Abner Louima on the year's worst.

When the dust settles, we're bound to draw some conclusions (apart from restricting Robert's caffeine intake).

The first is that the trickle of games with huge, open-ended worlds has turned into a river. Last year, there were only a couple of games, such as *Flashpoint* and *IL-2 Sturmovik*, that let users explore vast levels and find their own paths to success. This year, *GTA3* is the poster child for open-ended gameplay, but there were several others, including *Hitman 2*, *Morrowind*, and *Freedom Force*. It's a great trend that will grow in the years to come, particularly on the PC.

But the main conclusion is that, despite a lot of (well-deserved) attention and growth in console gaming, PC gaming continues to enjoy outstanding titles—and wonderful dilemmas for the gaming media. We can't wait to see what 2003 will bring.

Tune in next month to see our Game of the Year winners, along with readers' choice picks in all the major categories. Don't miss it!

PREVIEW

Rebels Wanted

Fighting "The Man" in a devastated world By Di Luo

We're not prone to giggling during game demos, but it's not often we see a rat wired with explosives scurry into a room full of enemies and blow up in a cloud of guts and debris. The new take on pest control is one of 40-plus weapons in *Devastation*, a story-driven first-person shooter set in a gritty, post-apocalyptic future. Based on the *Unreal* engine, the game is being developed by a group called Digitalo Studios, formed from the developers of the Infiltration mod for *Unreal Tournament*.

The world of *Devastation* is ruled by corporations rather than laws. Your role: Lead a few brave souls through 20 missions to overthrow the companies' rule. During the team-based levels, you order your teammates on simple tasks and toss them your spare weapons to boost their effectiveness. Nearly everything can be manipulated: Discarded bottles can be picked up and wielded as clubs or broken into shards to slit someone's throat.

Along with these ambitious single-player options are a dozen dedicated multiplayer maps: the usual modes like Deathmatch and Co-op, as well as a territory-capturing mode that has you sprinting to destroy your opponents' spawn point.

Since we didn't spot *Daikatana*-esque mechanical frogs or dragonflies in the preview build, it's possible that *Devastation* will be released by mid-2003.

DUMPSTER DIVER

Digging up gold in the bargain bins By Thierry Nguyen

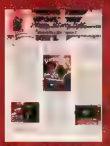
Please, don't buy *James Bond 007: NightFire*—every cent spent on it is another spray of urine across Ian Fleming's grave. Instead, use that President Grant to buy two fine space-based RTS games, a great tactical shooter, a Game of the Year winner, and the best railroad management sim ever.

Homeworld: GOTY Edition $10
Rails Across America $5
Conquest: Frontier Wars $4
SWAT 3 $20
Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight $10
James Bond 007: NightFire $50

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN *CGW*

Five Years Ago, March 1998

We're always finding out something new about our readers, and what we learned five years ago was that a lot of you aren't all that bright. Our "501 Cheats" story had all kinds of codes, but it seemed the only one our audience noticed was #501, a special cheat code to unlock the complete but as-yet-unreleased *StarCraft* from *WarCraft II*. We thought our tongue was in our cheek—seems our head was up our ass, since countless readers flamed us for having a code that didn't work.



Ten Years Ago, March 1993

Every so often, we get mail from readers asking us where the funny headlines went, the clever puns that were once the hallmark of *CGW*. We respond: What clever headlines? This issue featured a fine example. Right there on page 8 is Exhibit 1A against our alleged cleverness: "I See a Bad Probe Arisin'." Reflect on that one for a moment. Now, ask yourself: Do you really want to read those again?

Fifteen Years Ago, March 1988

"How many OIDS will have to spill their oil before the tyranny of the fiendish Biocretes can be brought to an end?" We don't know, and we don't want to know. Fifteen years ago, we were still learning a few things about writing about games—like how not to scare away readers with our write-ups. At least we knew what to put on the cover to sell magazines—how could Lane Mastodon versus the Blubbermen not reap tens upon tens of new readers?

AMERICAN CONQUEST

------ Three Centuries of War ------

- Epic real-time strategy with historical background
- Recreate the battles of history with up to 16,000 units
- 8 campaigns with 42 missions
- 12 playable nations and tribes
- Multiplayer mode for up to 7 players

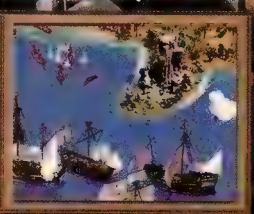
RELEASE:
February 2003

In the year 1492, travel to America as Christopher Columbus and light the spark that will kindle 300 years of heated battles for land, riches and freedom.

Utilize new technologies, unique weaponry, improved fighting units and the dangerous world of diplomacy.

PLAY WITH FIRE!
CONQUER AMERICA!

PLAY IT AMERICAN CONQUEST'S WAR OF INDEPENDENCE TOURNAMENT!
www.war-of-independence.com



TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

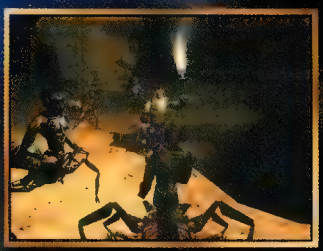
GAME WORLD

cdv
www.cdv.de

www.americanconquest.com

© 2002 CDV Software Entertainment

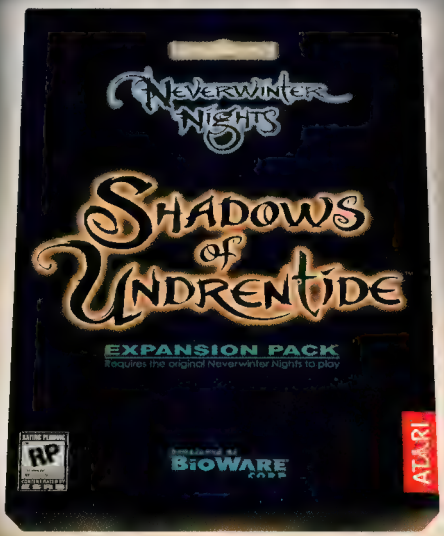
The best RPG... just got better.



Neverwinter Nights... a world without limits!

Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide, the first official full length Expansion to BioWare's award winning Neverwinter Nights featuring 40 hours of all new single player gameplay.

Build more compelling adventures with the enhanced Neverwinter Aurora Toolset. Three new tile sets, new monsters, weapons, feats, skills, and spells.



Powerful new and deadly devices are available to adventure designers through scripting - including projectile traps. The recently released Plot Wizard makes adventure creation easier than ever!

Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for more info.

ATARI

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS © 2002 Infogrames Entertainment, S.A. All Rights Reserved. Manufactured and marketed by Infogrames, Inc., New York, NY. Portions © 2002 Bioware Corp. All Rights Reserved.

PREVIEW

Well, Blow Me Down

Set sea in the swashbuckling sequel to *Sea Dogs* By Di Luo

It was a time when ships were made of wood, men were made of iron, and clichés flowed like grog. In the lawless waters of the Caribbean, only two things were respected: the size of your ship and the length of your guns. In *Sea Dogs II*, both spell the difference between boatloads of booty and a watery grave.

This action/RPG hybrid from Bethesda seems like it's being developed much more thoughtfully than the original—even expanding upon the game's role-playing potential. You'll have the option to play as either Blaze Devlin or Danielle Greene, two privateers seeking fame and fortune in an age of swashbuckling adventure. Though the two characters' paths cross during the game, each has distinct stories and missions.

Much like the original, *Sea Dogs II* will take place on land and sea. Adventures involve forays into port to recruit sailors, seek missions, fight duels, and find lost treasure. The designers are striving to make big improvements to this area of the game. Where *Sea Dogs* had little focus and too much wandering about, the sequel promises a more focused story arc and intense action; the missions should be more meaningful than a bunch of sea-faring FedEx deliveries. While at sea, you'll be tested by dangerous storms that can capsize your vessel, battles involving multiple ships, and boarding actions fought by your crews, instead of isolated duels between two captains.

Thanks to a graphics upgrade, the sequel boasts lovely visuals with impressive ships and nicely detailed characters. The ships look great, and the crewmembers are all rendered in 3D instead of being represented by numbers in a manifest. Hurray!

With a fleet of improvements, a vast ocean to explore, and plenty of open-ended gameplay, *Sea Dogs II* will be a powerful lure to any aspiring pirate captain. If she can't slake your thirst for adventure, you may be too salty to put to sea. Look for its sails to unfurl sometime in the middle of 2003.

The ships look great, and they finally have 3D crewmembers. Hurray!

Vazra
by Full Sail Student
Brian Germain

FULL SAIL
Real World Education

School of:
Game Design
Computer Animation
Digital Media
Film
Audio
Show Production

800.226.7625
www.fullsail.com

3300 University Boulevard
Winter Park, FL 32792

- Financial aid available to those who qualify.
- Job placement assistance.
- Accredited by ACCSCT.

©2001 Full Sail, Inc. All rights reserved. The terms "Full Sail," "Full Sail Real World Education," and the Full Sail logo are either registered service marks or service marks of Full Sail, Inc.

#13 THE EVER-CHANGING LANDSCAPE

by Scott McCloud

Since its *inception* in the underpowered brains of *early computing*, the art of *digital game design* has changed its shape as often as *computing itself.*

Other electronic forms like *television* can go for *decades* without significant changes in their *basic look* and *feel.*

But changes in the *technology* of gaming frequently lead to *wholesale revamping* of what it means to *"play."*

ZORK 199 — EVERQUEST 1999

ASTEROIDS 1979 — JT 2003

Coming to gaming as a relative *newbie* a few years ago,* I was struck by how the *boundaries* between game genres can *blur* and *shift* more often than in other media.

*See my first comic for CGW, back in issue 209.

Genres that *import* styles from *preexisting forms* of *entertainment* are especially prone to change when *new technologies* emerge.

FPS

RPG

SIMULATION

While *"native"* genres like *first-person shooters* took a fairly direct route to the computer screen, *"imported"* genres like *role-playing games* carried echoes of their *paper predecessors.*

BOARD GAMES DUNGEONS & DRAGONS — R.P.G.s

REAL LIFE COMBAT — F.P.S.s

The *isometric views* of *traditional RPGs,* as well as the *resource-hording, elaborate stats,* and dense fantasy *backstories* of the genre, are like a paper RPG *come to life.*

These trappings aren't *inherent* to the *concept* of *role-playing* any more than the *text interfaces* of the *earliest* computer RPGs were.

Instead, we're seeing a *new technology* (computers) gobbling up the trappings of the *previous technology* (paper and dice) for its *content.*

I explained this sort of thing in *1969*, but did they *listen?*

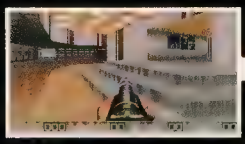
Much-maligned media maven, Marshall "The Medium is the Message" McLuhan.

The growth of *first-person shooters* has taken a more direct path -- and a *simpler* one.

CLAK

The shooters have their predecessors ***too,*** of course --

-- but from Doom onward, the idea of representing ***first-person combat*** on the ***computer screen*** was played out in the most direct way possible --



-- so that despite vastly improved ***graphics*** and ***speed,*** games like ***Unreal Tournament 2003*** still retain a similar ***look*** and ***feel*** to their digital ***ancestors.***

It's still too soon to draw any kind of reliable ***map*** of the ***landscape*** of electronic gaming, but there are ***trends.***

AUTHOR ▸▸ USER:
The genres that feature heavily-authored ***stories*** and ***adventures*** -- attempts to fit the user into ***linear story lines*** -- continue to ***shrink*** with each passing year --

Pay attention now as we explain your next ***assignment...***

-- while ***open-ended, user-driven gameplay*** continues to grow in ***popularity*** and ***sophistication.***

HARDCORE ▸▸ MAINSTREAM

Not always ***good*** news for ***PC gamers,*** the gateway ***into*** gaming is getting a lot more ***accessible,**** often through ***consoles*** and other devices.

*And ***dumber?*** You decide.

IMPORTED ▸▸ NATIVE
Gradually, computer games are weaning themselves from the need to imitate ***pre-digital*** gaming and are discovering their ***native strengths.***

OBSERVATION ▸▸ IMMERSION
We're still a ways off from ***pure V.R.,*** but don't doubt for a minute that that's where we're ***headed*** -- and when we arrive, ***"first-person"*** will gain a ***whole new dimension.***

ISOLATION ▸▸ CONNECTION
Whatever we think of their ***current*** incarnations, ***online multiplayers*** are ***here to stay*** and will give birth to ***whole new genres*** this decade.

The Proverbial *Elephant in the Room.*

And as the ***social aspect*** of some online games goes from a ***side feature*** to their ***reason for being --***

Expect the Earth to ***move again*** under the landscape of this ***turbulent new industry.***

PIPELINE

Are they shipping or slipping? By Di Luo

Keep in mind that release dates are basically best guesses for most companies until the game gets closer to being finished. Generally, the farther along the game is, the more accurate its release date—but even then, anything can happen.

LORDS OF THE REALM III: It's been seven years since the release of *Lords II*, one of the most original historical strategy games of its time. Word is finally trickling out about its successor, a fully 3D and real-time game set in the Middle Ages. Gameplay in *Lords III* will involve economic, political, and military aspects, with a bit of castle building thrown in. Though details are scarce, it's scheduled to come out by the end of 2003.

SAVAGE: It's good to see that originality and innovation still exist in computer gaming. Developed by newcomer S2 Games, *Savage* is a mix of RTS and FPS. The game is set in the far future, when Earth has devolved into a place of warring primitive tribes. Players can choose to play as the commander in RTS mode, responsible for managing resources and conducting research. Most players will probably opt for the action mode, fighting out the battle in first-person. If everything stays on schedule, you should see it by this summer.

AMERICAN MCGEE'S OZ: The creator of *Alice* is back with another stylish game based on a children's tale. According to American McGee, the game will be "a third-person action adventure in the spirit of *Zelda 64* and *GTA3*." As with *Alice*, the goal of the designer is to create a game that would appeal to the mass market. But this time, McGee plans to "reduce the number of jump puzzles and the linearity of the player's path through the world." McGee also plans to design a line of detailed Oz action figures. Watch for his latest creations to find their way onto shelves some time in 2004.

1503 A.D. The New World	EA	Q1 2003
All American: The 82nd Airborne	Shrapnel	Q2 2003
American Conquest	CDV	Q2 2003
American McGee's Oz	Carbon 6	Q2 2004
Battlefield 1942: The Road to Rome	EA	Q2 2003
Black Moon Chronicles: Winds of War	Cryo Networks	Unknown
Breed	CDV	Q2 2003
City of Heroes	NCsoft	Q2 2003
Civil War: War Between the States	Walker Boys	Unknown
Command & Conquer: Generals	EA	Q1/Q3/03
Commandos 3	Eidos	Q2 2003
Conflict: Desert Storm	SCi	Q4, 2002
Cossacks: Napoleonic Wars	CDV	Q3 2003
Crusader Kings	Strategy First	Q1 2003
Deadlands	Headfirst	Q3 2003
Devastation	Arush	Q3 2003
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	Q1 2003
Deus Ex 2	Eidos	Q2 2003
Doom III	Activision	Q2 2003
Driver 3	Infogrames	Q2 2003
Escape from Alcatraz	HIP	Q1 2003
EverQuest II	Sony	Q4 2003
Freelancer	Microsoft	Q1 2003
Full Throttle 2	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Galactic Civilizations	Strategy First	Q1 2003
Ghost Master	Empire	Q1 2003
Gothic II	JoWooD	Q1 2003
Hannibal	Arxel Tribe	Q2 2004
Halo	Microsoft	Q2 2003
Harpoon 4	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Heaven and Hell	CDV	Q2 2003
Hidden & Dangerous 2	GOD Games	Q2 2003
Highland Warriors	Data Becker	Q1 2003
Homeworld 2	Sierra	Q3 2003
IGI 2: Covert Strike	Codemasters	Q1 2003
Imperium Galactica III	CDV	Q2 2003
Indiana Jones	LucasArts	Q1 2003
Lineage II	NCSoft	Q3 2003
Lionheart	Interplay	Q1 2003
Lock-On	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Lords of the Realm III	Sierra	Q4 2003
Max Payne II	GOD Games	Unknown
Metal Gear Solid 2	Konami	Q1 2003
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	Infogrames	Q1 2003
PlanetSide	Sony	Q1 2003
Postal 2	Running With Scissors	Q1 2003
Praetorians	Eidos	Q1 2003
Pro Race Driver	Codemasters	Q1 2003
Quake 4	Activision	Unknown
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	Q2/Q4/03
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	Q1 2003
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Q2 2003
Rolling Thunder	Strategy First	Q2 2003
Sam and Max 2	LucasArts	Q1 2004
Savage	iGames	Q2 2003
Sea Dogs II	Bethesda	Q3 2003
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Sovereign	Sony	Q1 2004
Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Stars! Supernova Genesis	Mare Crisium	Q1 2003
Star Trek: Elite Force II	Ritual	Q1 2003
Star Wars Galaxies	LucasArts	4/15/03
Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	Q1 2003
Stalker: Oblivion Lost	GSC	Q4 2003
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	Q4 2003
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	Unknown
The Movies	Lionhead	Unknown
They Came From Hollywood	Octopus Motor	Q2 2003
Thief III	Eidos	Q2 2003
Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness	Eidos	Q1 2003
Total Annihilation 2	Infogrames	Q4 2003
Tribes Game	Sierra	Unknown
Tron 2.0	Monolith	Q2 2003
Tropico 2	GOD Games	Q2 2003
Two Towers	Vivendi	Q3 2003
Unreal II	Infogrames	Q1 2003
Vultures	CDV	Q4 2003
WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne	Blizzard	Q3 2003
War of the Rings	Vivendi	Q3 2004
Warlords IV	Ubi Soft	Q2 2003
World of WarCraft	Blizzard	Unknown
World War II	Codemasters	Q1 2003
XIII	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003

NEW UPDATE

I ALONE HAVE THE FIFTH FREEDOM.

THE RIGHT TO SPY, STEAL, DESTROY AND ASSASSINATE,

TO ENSURE THAT AMERICAN FREEDOMS ARE PROTECTED.

I AM SAM FISHER.

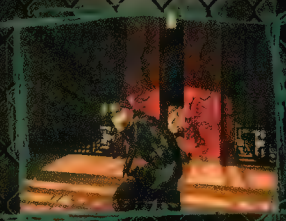
I AM A SPLINTER CELL.

"Best Score Ever! 9.6"

Official Xbox Magazine – Editor's Choice Award

"Splinter Cell will change the way people look at video games."

Electronic Gaming Monthly



Experience the ultimate in Xbox™ graphics.

Force enemies to cooperate or use them as human shields.

Tom Clancy's SPLINTER CELL

www.splintercell.com

STEALTH ACTION REDEFINED

DOWNLOAD NEW CONTENT ON LIVE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore

Violence

Ubi Soft ENTERTAINMENT www.ubi.com

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

XBOX

NVIDIA

© 2002 Ubi Soft Entertainment. All Rights Reserved. Ubi Soft Entertainment and the Ubi Soft logo are registered trademarks of Ubi Soft Entertainment. Splinter Cell is a trademark of Ubi Soft Entertainment. All Rights Reserved. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Microsoft, Xbox and the Xbox Logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or in other countries and are used under license from Microsoft.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell *(Ubi Soft)* Infiltrate terrorists' positions, acquire critical intelligence by any means necessary, execute with extreme prejudice, and exit without a trace! The world balance is in your hands, as cyber terrorism and international tensions are about to explode into WWIII.

Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided *(LucasArts)* A massively multiplayer online role-playing game that lets you assume the role of nearly any type of character in the Star Wars universe. Interact with thousands of other players, as well as established characters from the movies.

Delta Force V: Black Hawk Down *(Novalogic)* Engage in urban Close Quarter Battles and long-range sniper fire. Fight through various compelling missions, each with multiple objectives using combat tactics and scenarios provided by former Special Operations Force Soldiers.

Counterstrike: Condition Zero *(Sierra)* This new standalone game extends the award-winning Counter-Strike multiplayer game with new maps, weapons, and more while simultaneously introducing new technologies, an extensive single-player campaign, and cooperative play.

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield *(Red Storm)* Command an elite, multi-national squad of special operatives against a hidden terrorist foe. Race against time to stop terror and unravel a mystery. Lead your team in a desperate effort to battle a madman and foil his doomsday plot.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES

SimCity 4 *(EA Games)* Don't just build your city, breathe life into it. With god-like powers, sculpt mountains, gouge riverbeds, and seed forests to lay the groundwork for your creation. The impact of your touch will be immediate but not entirely predictable.

Master of Orion 3 *(Infogrames)* Play one of 16 unique star-faring races or create your own custom race, and explore rich solar systems, complete with jump lanes, worm holes and hostile alien races. Engage in Colossal Space Battles that feature beautiful, tactical real-time combat resolution.

Battlefield 1942: The Road to Rome *(Electronic Arts)* Up to six new maps to fight on, including Operation Husky (Sicily) and the battles for Anzio and Monte Cassino. This multiplayer-focused expansion pack gives you more of everything—maps, vehicles, weapons, and more fighting forces.

NASCAR Racing 2003 Season *(Sierra)* The next installment in the acclaimed racing series includes enhanced 3D graphics and audio, new tutorials, and official NASCAR 2003 season teams, drivers, and paint schemes. Guaranteed to surprise even the most diehard fan of the series.

The Sims Deluxe Edition *(Electronic Arts)* The Sims, The Sims Living Large, and a host of all-new exclusive features in one Deluxe package. Create any Sim you can imagine with the powerful Sims Creator, Furnish your homes with two completely new design sets with over 25 new objects.

All available now at the Computer & Video Games store at

amazon.com.

Get thousands of game titles at amazon.com/videogames

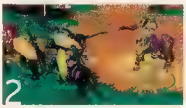
Amazon.com is a registered trademark of Amazon.com, Inc.

SURVEY

CGW Top 20

The best PC games, as voted by gamers

GTA3–Game of the Year?



Blizzard's reign continues with *WarCraft III*.

James Bond's got nothin' on *Max Payne*.

RANK	GAME	RATING
1	**Grand Theft Auto III** (Take 2 Interactive)	★★★★★
2	**WarCraft III** (Blizzard/Vivendi)	★★★★½
3	**Max Payne** (GodGames)	★★★★½
4	**Unreal Tournament 2003** (Infogrames)	★★★★½
5	**Diablo II: Lord of Destruction** (Blizzard/Vivendi)	★★★★★
6	**Medal of Honor: Allied Assault** (EA)	★★★★½
7	**Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast** (LucasArts)	★★★★★
8	**Battlefield 1942** (EA)	★★★★½
9	**Age of Mythology** (Microsoft)	★★★★½
10	**Hitman 2** (Eidos)	★★★★½
11	**Neverwinter Nights** (Infogrames)	★★★★½
12	**The Elder Scrolls: Morrowind** (Bethesda)	★★★★½
13	**Mafia** (Take 2)	★★★½☆
14	**No One Lives Forever 2** (Sierra)	★★★★½
15	**Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal** (Interplay)	★★★★★
16	**Dungeon Siege** (Microsoft)	★★★★½
17	**Sid Meier's Civilization III** (Infogrames)	★★★★★
18	**Aliens Versus Predator 2** (Sierra)	★★★★½
19	**Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit** (EA)	★★★★★
20	**Freedom Force** (EA)	★★★★★

The Top 20 is obtained from a survey of 1,000 readers' favorite games from the last two years. To vote, visit our website at www.computergaming.com.

GREAT DEALS ON PC GAMES

NASCAR Racing 2003 Season
(Sierra)

Regular Price: ~~$49.99~~

Pre-Order Sale Price! **$39.99**

This is the latest installment in the racing series that have been bestsellers for many years since the the first rendition back in the early 90's.

Features:

- Display all forty-three pit crews and war wagons on pit row
- Enhanced graphics engine provides realistic touches as the glare off of wind shields and four distinct car models
- Dirt and oil buildup on a windshield as the race progresses.

Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings
(Microsoft)

Regular Price: ~~$49.99~~

Sale Price! **$39.99**

The next-generation fantasy massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) where the world dynamically evolves around you.

Features:

- Venture forth and shape the course of this ever-evolving world
- Join in huge allegiances to rebuild your cities and resources
- State of the art 3-D graphics, innovative combat and game play and a dynamic monthly update system

Impossible Creatures
(Microsoft)

Regular Price: ~~$44.99~~

Sale Price! **$34.99**

A real-time strategy game of combat and discovery, where imagination and experimentation are your biggest allies in a struggle against evil.

Features:

- Thousands of units, can be combined to create a vast array of mutant creatures
- Rich 3-D worlds ready to be explored
- Compelling single-player campaigns
- Fast and ferocious multiplayer games focus on furious, combat-driven action.

Check Out More Great Deals Online at

amazon.com.

"It's gonna save PC gaming as we know it." CGW

Unreal® II - The Awakening © 2002 Epic Games Inc. Raleigh, N.C. USA Unreal and the Unreal logo are registered trademarks of Epic Games, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Unreal II – The Awakening was created by Legend Entertainment, an Infogrames studio and was manufactured and marketed by Infogrames, Inc. New York, NY, under license from Epic Games, Inc. The Atari trademark and logo are the property of Infogrames. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

Unreal II
THE AWAKENING
RATING PENDING
RP
Visit www.esrb.org or
call 1-800-771-3772
for Rating Information
LEGEND
ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY
EPIC
GAMES
ATARI

IN THIS ARENA, WARRIORS ARE CREATED, BATTLES ARE FORGED, SMACK IS TALKED.

The Xbox *Live*™ service is the world's first no-holds-barred, ultimate online arena dedicated to high-speed gaming. Jump from game to game and play thousands of other players using one GamerTag. You can't do that anywhere else.

XBOX

†Whacked™ includes three arenas. MotoGP2 includes three tracks. Online game play and/or downloadable content not available for all games. Specific game features are called out on the game packaging. Visit your local retailer for more information. ©2003 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Microsoft, Whacked!™, Xbox, the Xbox logos, and Xbox Live are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association. The names of actual companies and products mentioned herein may be trademarks of their respective owners. Xbox Live subscription sold separately.

YOU AIN'T GONNA RULE THE ULTIMATE ARENA WITH A NAME LIKE BUNNY23

Use your unique GamerTag to build your rep across all games. After all, you'll need it to grow your legend in this arena.

THOSE VOICES IN YOUR HEAD ARE VOICES IN YOUR HEADSET

With the hands-free Xbox Communicator, you can talk trash, call plays, disguise your voice, and even mute the sucker that won't shut up.

IT'S LIKE 50,000 OF YOUR CLOSEST FRIENDS. ONLY THEY ALL WANT TO SCHOOL YOU

Play your old friends and make some new ones.
Just remember to show them who's boss.

USE THE OPTIMATCH™ SYSTEM AND QUICKMATCH TO FIND THE PERFECT OPPONENT

Quickly find the perfect game, with the arena and rules you choose, so you won't waste your time with rookies or get destroyed by grizzled veterans.

DOWNLOAD NEW CONTENT, SO THE GAME NEVER ENDS

Get different weapons, new characters, additional levels, and more with downloadable content that will extend your game like never before.

GET YOUR STARTER KIT FOR JUST $49.99* AND ARM YOURSELF FOR ENTRY.

$49.99*

$49.99* INCLUDES:
1 YEAR OF XBOX *LIVE* SERVICE
XBOX COMMUNICATOR HEADSET
WHACKED!™ AND MotoGP ONLINE DEMO GAMES†

FOR THE ULTIMATE ONLINE ARENA, THERE'S NO POWER GREATER THAN X.

www.xbox.com/live

PRODUCTS RANGE FROM EVERYONE TO MATURE
E-M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

XBOX LIVE

*Estimated retail price. Actual retail prices may vary.

"A perfect bet for fans of online action"
IGN
"Possibly the best online team-based game ever"
G.A.M.
BATTLEFIELD 1942
BATTLEFIELD 1942 THE ROAD TO ROME
New Available
Battlefield 1942: The Road to Rome Expansion Pack requires Battlefield 1942 to play.
BATTLEFIELD 1942
join the fight at: battlefield1942.ea.com

Italy, July 18- Fighting is still heavy on all fronts with word of new battles raging throughout Italy. Reports continue to stream in of never-before-seen tanks and bombers joining the conflict, a total of 43 military assault vehicles at last count.

Intel suggests the possibility of online engagement with up to 64 soldiers of unknown allegiance. Armed resistence is expected to be fierce utilizing any combination of 23 lethal weapons. These battles are huge. But then again so is the prize:Victory.

T TEEN Violence CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PC CD ROM

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

COMPUTER GAMING EDITORS' CHOICE

GAMES EDITOR'S CHOICE

GameSpy Best of E3 2002 Action

DICE

EA GAMES Challenge Everything

Onward to
victory
"The game could easily take it's rightful place among the very best online shooters."
GAMESPOT
"An online action experience we simply should not miss"
GAMESPY
"Battlefield 1942 ... a spectacular and successful game."
PC GAMER

RISE OF NATIO

Age of Empires + Civilization = Greatness By George Jones

RTS design is fueled by a simple notion: decision-making. Give the gamer too much control and gameplay becomes overwhelming. Instead of focusing on key decisions, excitement takes a back seat to mundane maintenance tasks. Too few decisions to make and you coast along on autopilot while your civilization thrives.

Gamers' increasing familiarity with the genre complicates the matter. The more of these games we play, the more power-hungry we get. Tolerance drops for the standard maintenance-play mechanics, like moving idle villagers to mines and watching them transport metal/food/whatever. Hey, we want to make more decisions, but we don't want to *do* everything.

By upping the decision-making ante, streamlining the tedious, and borrowing heavily from Sid Meier's *Civilization*, former Meier cohort Brian Reynolds and his designers at Big Huge Games are on to something, well, huge. Judging by an early beta *CGW* has been playing for weeks, Big Huge Games' *Rise of Nations* appears to be on the verge of absolutely nailing the real-time strategy sweet spot in a way very few games have accomplished.

Remember when playing real-time strategy games felt like a constant, precarious, manic balancing act? Those days are back.

Getting a rise

At first blush, gamers may blanch at *Rise of Nations*. It looks so much like *Age of Empires*—in color palette, interface, and overall tone—that you'll swear it's an Ensemble game. Trust us, though, it isn't the same.

Perhaps the most innovative change is the fully realized, *Civilization*-style research tree. Technically, it's not really a tree; instead, it's a five-track horizontal progression that measures your advancements in military, science, civics, commerce, and overall age.

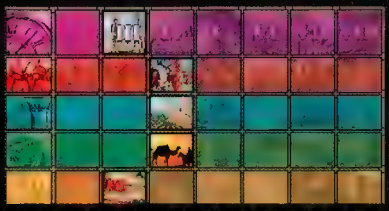
This major tweak works so well because it adds what the real-time genre sorely needs: an extra strategic layer that results in a broader variety of methods to win and lose contests, and an increased ability to reactively strategize. A nice bonus is that it streamlines play: Since 90 percent of research and development now occurs by clicking on the library building, gamers won't have to constantly hunt for individual buildings to develop improvements.

Marx would be proud

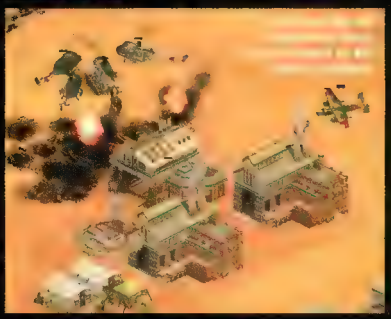
Another example of Big Huge Games' clear-cut focus on improving the *Rise of Nations*' strategic flavor can be seen as you gather resources. In a tactical shift away from the RTS norm and toward the philosophy of *Civilization*, worker-peasants no longer have to trek from raw resource-to-resource depot and back. In *Rise of Nations*, you simply assign workers to forests, farms, or mountains. Each resource area on the map permits a certain number of workers—and once the workers are placed, your resources accumulate automatically. The more workers assigned, the faster the accumulation.

Brian Reynolds and his design team have incorporated numerous other enhancements. Country borders protect your nation and limit where you can expand. Sid Meier–inspired Wonders provide tangible benefits to your civilization, like enhancing production or increasing revenue. Special resources such as diamonds, buffalo, and salt can be controlled to a nation's benefit. Enemy cities get assimilated into your empire rather than destroyed. You'll have the ability to play into the modern age. The list goes on and on.

It all makes for some instantaneous and obvious differences, both in strategy and in overall pacing. Remember back in the day, when playing real-time strategy games felt like a constant, precarious, manic balancing act? Those days are back. When it ships in March 2003, *Rise of Nations* will likely be the most entertainingly complex, multi-dimensional real-time strategy game gamers have ever seen. And the fact that it will be hitting shelves right about the time gamers have exhausted *Age of Mythology* sure isn't going to hurt.

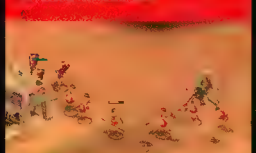


Learn it, love it, live it—you'll be clicking on your library early and often to advance your nation's military, science, civics, commerce, and age.



Multifaceted multiplayer

Rise of Nations features a slew of multiplayer game types and rule sets. Here's a selection of the more interesting ones:



ASSASSIN: Each nation is assigned a target nation. Once you've destroyed your target, you're given another target nation.

BARBARIANS AT THE GATE: One nation defends itself from a horde of others.

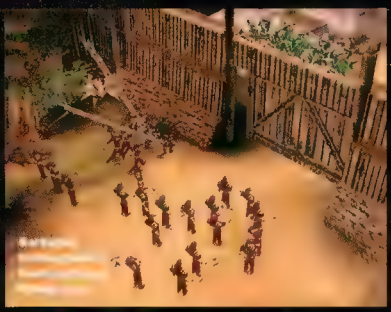
NO RUSH: No attacks until the Gunpowder Age.

SUDDEN DEATH: You lose instantly if one of your cities is captured.

PEACEFUL: No combat—the first player to reach the Information Age wins.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT
DEVELOPER: BIG HUGE GAMES
GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY
RELEASE DATE: MARCH 2003



PRAETORIANS

Death and destruction in ancient Rome

By Di Luo

For megalomaniacs who lust after world domination, nothing is more tedious than picking berries, chopping trees, or digging for ore. After all, your world-renowned strategic skills are put to better use on the battlefield than as the bean-counting quartermaster. Pyro Studios, the group of guys that brought you the *Commandos* series, present *Praetorians*, an RTS that will free you from the mundane tasks of the genre to concentrate on the real fun—fighting and conquest.

Praetorians does away with the base building and peon management prominent in many other games. You won't need to spend half an hour building up your economy; instead, you'll be able to throw yourself into the action right away. The only "resource" in the game comes from the populations of conquered villages that supply you with new recruits. Much of the game therefore revolves around the control of strategically important towns on the map, since God and victory are usually on the side of the bigger battalion.

The available game modes are similar to those in most RTS games. The single-player campaign will have more than 20 missions, which take place in the far-flung provinces of Rome. You'll fight off ferocious barbarians in snowy Gaul, face religious fanatics in the blistering deserts of Egypt, and battle traitors on the green pastures of Rome. There is definitely much eye candy to be found at these exotic locales, since both the units and the maps are rendered in beautiful 3D graphics.

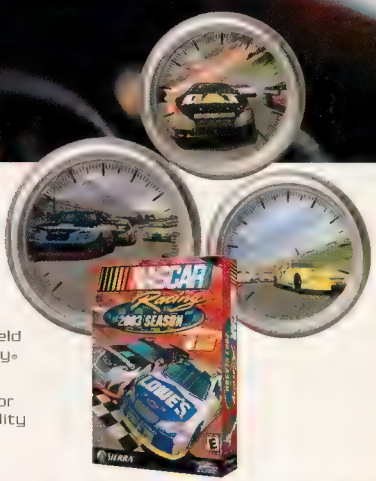
To those looking for a *Roman: Total War*, search elsewhere. While it's set during the time of Julius Caesar, *Praetorians* borrows the flavor of the period without being burdened by the nitpicky historical facts. For example, you'll be able to command units of gladiators, heavy cavalry more akin to medieval knights than to Republican auxiliaries, and your units will all go into battle with cries of "For the Emperor!," even though Rome under Julius Caesar was a republic.

While the details may make historians cringe, *Praetorians* nevertheless takes into account many realistic factors. Units will have fatigue levels, and will be able to use terrain features like forests for protection, and to ambush enemies by hiding in concealing reeds or trees. Units such as the Roman legionnaires will also use historical tactics like throwing their pilums before engaging in melee.

The preview build we saw already looked very polished. If Pyro's track record is any indication (and we hope it is), you should have a great game to satisfy your need for conquest in the first part of 2003.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EIDOS
DEVELOPER: PYRO STUDIOS
GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY
RELEASE DATE: MARCH 2003



DETAIL #66212

ITEM: Windshield debris

TAKEN FROM: #12 ALLTEL Dodge windshield at North Carolina Speedway®

NOTES: Simulate native cicada (aka *Tibicen chloromera*) for realistic Rockingham visibility

NASCAR® Racing: 2003 Season. The most authentic, detail-packed NASCAR® PC racing experience ever. Period.

LEGENDARY AUTHENTICITY. UNPARALLELED RACING.

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

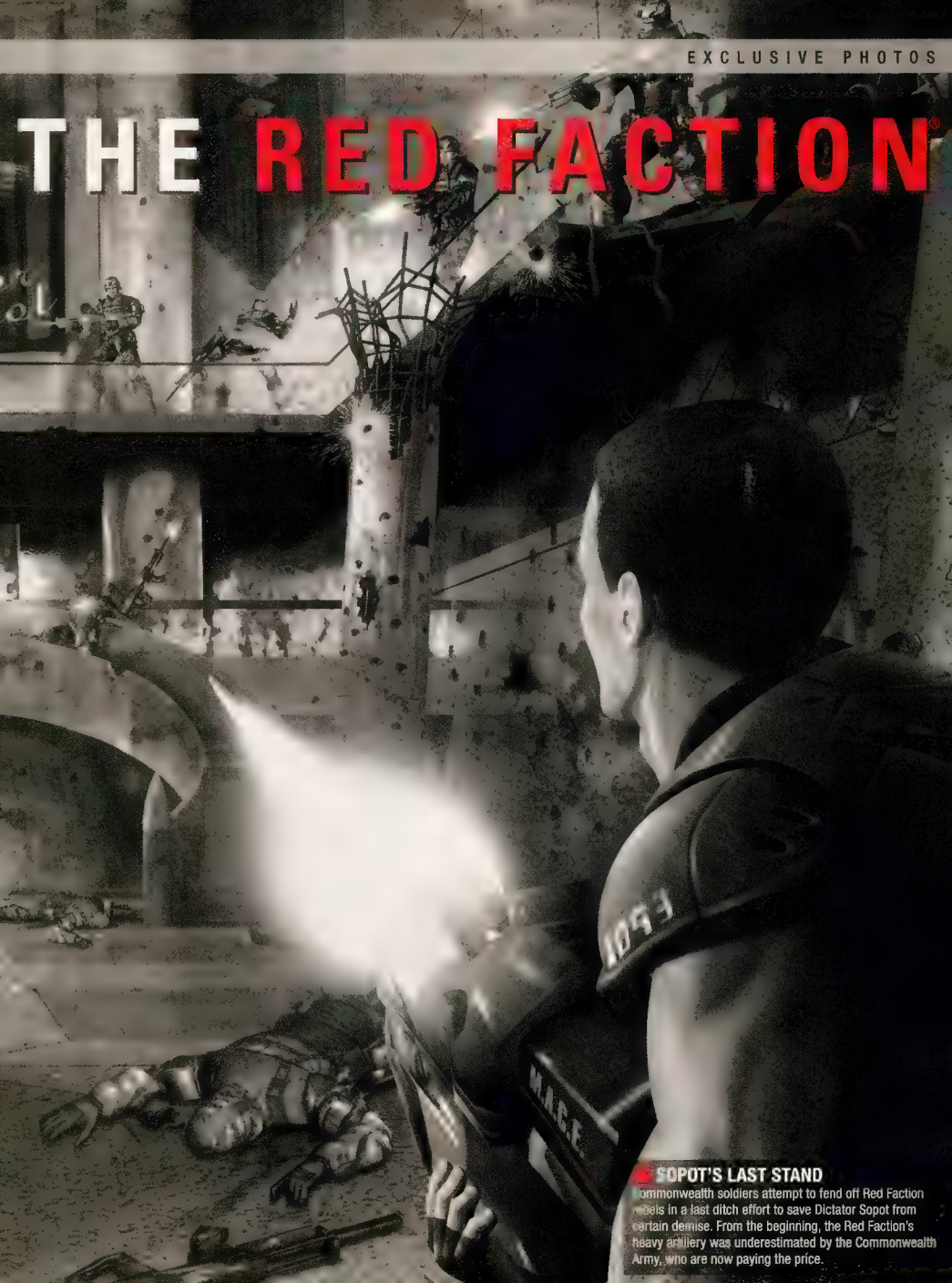
NASCAR VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES PC CD-ROM DODGE GRAB LIFE BY THE HORNS OFFICIAL Licensed Product GM LAPTOP RACING SERIES SIERRA

sierra.com/games/nascar2003

©2003 Sierra Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Sierra and the Sierra logo are trademarks of Sierra Entertainment, Inc. Vivendi Universal Games and the Vivendi Universal Games logo are trademarks of Vivendi Universal Games, Inc. Papyrus and the Papyrus logo are trademarks of Papyrus Design Group, Inc. NASCAR® is a registered trademark of the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, Inc. General Motors Trademarks used under license to Papyrus Racing Games. Dodge is a trademark of DaimlerChrysler Corporation. Dodge Intrepid and its trade dress are used under license by Sierra Entertainment, Inc. ©DaimlerChrysler Corporation 2003. ©2003 Ford Motor Company. "Ford Taurus" trademarks used under license from Ford Motor Company. North Carolina Speedway® used under license from International Speedway Corporation. All other names, likenesses and trademarks are the properties of their respective owners and are used under permission to Papyrus Racing Games.

THE PLIGHT OF

THE RED FACTION®



SOPOT'S LAST STAND
Commonwealth soldiers attempt to fend off Red Faction rebels in a last ditch effort to save Dictator Sopot from certain demise. From the beginning, the Red Faction's heavy artillery was underestimated by the Commonwealth Army, who are now paying the price.

COMMONWEALTH COUP

The Red Faction is using their entire arsenal in the latest attempt to

FROM THE AIR

The Red Faction customized Aesir is a maneuverable air assault vehicle equipped with optical zoom which allows for precise hits on enemy targets.

Drop Point *5:37am*
Troops assemble at the Sopot Harbor.

SOPOT CITY

CIVILIAN UPRISING

After Sopot's forces withdrew from the main city, several Red Faction rebels raided Harbor Island and desecrated the symbolic statue of the dictator.

RED FACTION II

MATURE
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Violence

For more up-to-the-minute coverage of the conflict, go to *www.redfaction2.com*

© 2002 2003 THQ Inc. Red Faction®, GeoMod™ technology, Volition, THQ and their respective logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of THQ Inc. All rights reserved.

FREEDOM

D'ETAT

overthrow the Dictator Sopot.

Public Information Building *6:05am*
Commonwealth Elite Guards attempt to fend off the attacking Faction soldiers.

The Slums *6:22am*
Rebel soldiers continue to fight despite rumors of growing animosity between Faction leaders.

PC CD ROM

volition

THQ

www.thq.com

CHILLS AND THRILLS

BLIZZARD RETURNS TO THE BATTLEFIELD IN *WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE*

You didn't really think it was over, did you? You didn't think that the war in Azeroth would actually ever end? If you did, then you underestimate the juggernaut that is the *WarCraft* franchise, as well as the ambition of its creators at Blizzard Entertainment. You also haven't been playing computer games for very long, because everyone knows that expansion packs are as inevitable now as delays, patches, and collector's editions—especially with million-sellers.

So, yeah: surprise, surprise. There's a *WarCraft III* expansion. But lest you mistake this for a glorified patch—as we've seen too many times lately—recall that Blizzard's previous expansion packs have included *StarCraft: Brood War* and *WarCraft II: Beyond the Dark Portal*—two outstanding efforts that were practically entirely new games unto themselves. Such is the case with *WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne*, a big, generous expansion, in which the creators tie up the dangling plot threads left hanging at the end of *WarCraft III*, and introduce a host of new heroes, units, maps, and more, for both single- and multiplayer combatants.

LS!

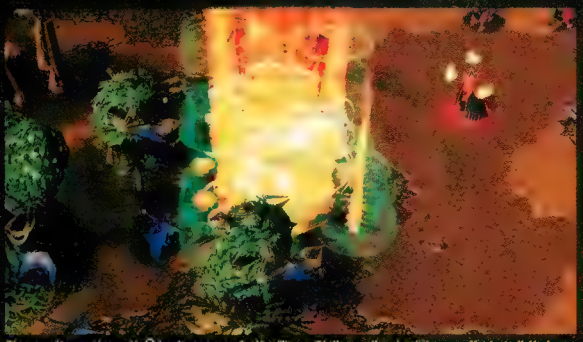
BY JEFF GREEN

SPOILER ALERT!

We can't discuss *The Frozen Throne*'s plot without referring to the end of *WarCraft III*, so if you haven't finished that game yet—avert your eyes now. OK? We mean it. Stop reading.

The expansion is set about six months after the end of *WarCraft III*. Though peace is at hand, and the Burning Legion has been destroyed, there's still trouble. The Lich King—Ner'zhul, the former Orc shaman—is still imprisoned inside the Icecrown glacier (the "frozen throne") on the arctic continent of Northrend. Without physical form, bound forever by his blood pact with the Burning Legion, the Lich King longs to find a host body to possess so he can escape. And he has the perfect candidate in *WarCraft III*'s most tragic character—Arthas, the former heir to the Human throne, who had succumbed to evil temptation, killing his father, King Terenas, and joining the ranks of the Undead.

Is the former Human prince destined to become the new Lich King? Or is that the fate of Illidan, the former Night Elf sorcerer who had also succumbed to evil? Can the battle-weary good guys rally one last time and rescue Lordaeron from the clutches of Arthas and the Undead?



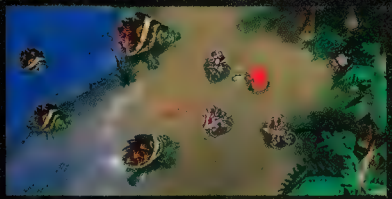
The new Human hero, the blood mage, casts the Flame Strike spell, a brutal area-affect spell that rains down fire for massive damage.

NEW HEROES

To answer these questions, Blizzard is creating an entirely new campaign (complete with CG cut-scenes, which lead designer Rob Pardo estimates is about 80 percent to 90 percent the size of *WarCraft III*. You'll play Human, Undead, and Night Elf arcs, though the exact order has not yet been determined. There's no Orc campaign in the main story line—more on that in a bit.

While there's no new playable race (alas, no Burning Legion!), there will be one new hero and two new units for each existing race, along with tons of new spells, items, and abilities. This is a work in progress, so not all of the new units for the expansion have been decided on yet—and note that those mentioned here could change over time as a result of Blizzard's incessant tweaking.

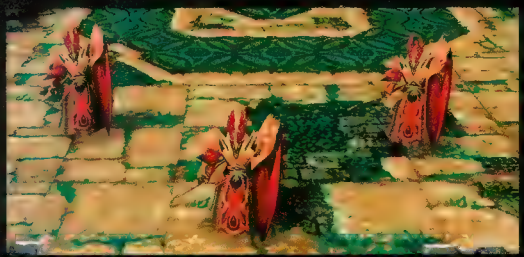
The new Night Elf hero, the warden, demonstrates why she might be the most badass new hero, casting her Fan of Knives while surrounded by enemies.



Amphibious sea turtles are just one of the new creep types. Lure them out of the water with a ranged attack, and then pound on them.

HUMANS

The new Human hero is the blood mage, an offensive spellcaster with four brutal fire and chaos spells at his disposal. Flame Strike is an area-affect damage spell, like Blizzard, that rains down fire on a targeted area. Mana Flare is another area-affect spell, specifically aimed at enemy spellcasters. When cast, Mana Flare sends a "disco globe" into the sky that will shoot out lightning bolts at any casters (including heroes) in the area that attempt to use mana. Third is Banish, a single-target spell that you can cast on an enemy or friendly unit to temporarily banish that unit from the material plane. Any banished enemy unit will be unable to attack, while a banished friendly unit will take no damage—perfect for a hero in trouble. Finally, there's Mark of Fire, a high-level spell that will transform any friendly unit into a tough demon unit with a powerful melee attack.



These three bad boys are Human spell breakers, who can render friendly units immune to debuffs and steal spells from any casters.

Along with the blood mage, two other units are planned for the Human side. The spell breaker does just what it sounds like, breaks the magic of enemies with two cool abilities: Spell Immunity is a passive area-affect spell that renders all nearby friendly units immune to debuffs, and Spell Steal is an autocast spell that steals buffs cast on enemy units (like Bloodlust) and casts them on nearby friendlies. The other new unit is the dragon hawk, an aerial unit with both ground and air attacks, and one powerful spell, Fog, which can effectively disable enemy towers.

NIGHT ELVES

The Night Elves are also getting a new, more offense-oriented hero, the warden. Think "elf ninja" here—fragile, with few hit points, but quick, stealthy, and deadly. Her two main abilities are essentially meant to be used together. The Blink ability allows her to do instant short-range teleports, while the awesome Fan of Knives causes her to spin around and shoot knives at enemies in all directions. Sneak in, kill everything, sneak out. Though she's low on hit points, she's well-protected by her ultimate passive ability, Spirit of Vengeance, which will hunt down and destroy any unit that actually kills her. It's a nice trick—kill the warden if you must, but then be prepared to die afterward.

Blizzard had one other new Night Elf unit ready at press time: the mountain giant, a big, beefy melee unit meant to help protect the weaker archers, huntresses, and dryads through the use of his Taunt spell, which will draw enemy units to him and away from others.

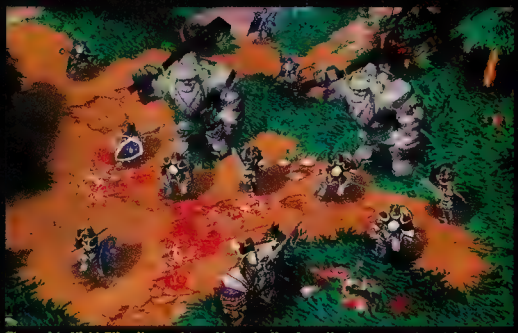
UNDEAD

The Undead are getting a lot nastier with their new hero, the crypt lord—a bigger, uglier, more powerful version of the arachnid crypt fiends, with both offensive and defensive abilities. Using Impale, he can skewer a unit with the horn on his head and toss it in the air for major damage. Defensively,

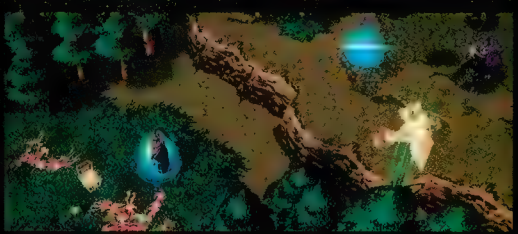
The new Orc hero, the shadow hunter, can cast Healing Wave, a welcome group-healing spell for the ugly green guys.

LEAD DESIGNER ROB PARDO ESTIMATES THAT *THE FROZEN THRONE* CAMPAIGN WILL BE ABOUT 80 PERCENT TO 90 PERCENT THE SIZE OF THE CAMPAIGN IN *WARCRAFT III*.

You want big enemies to kill? Try this guy, a sea giant behemoth.



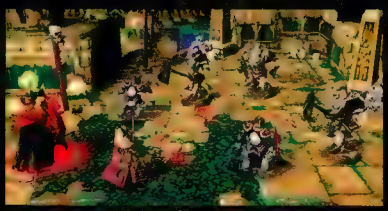
Those girly Night Elf units now have able protection from the humongous mountain giants.



The Night Elf warden excels as a stealth ninja-type hero, thanks largely to the Blink spell, which allows for instant short-range transportation. The blue auras here show the "before" and "after" spots.

Up close and personal with the crypt lord, the new Undead hero unit, an offensive and defensive arse-kicker.

Mom, I'd like you to meet the spell breaker. He will make me immune to your debuffs.



Humans do battle with skeletal Orcs, another new creep type.

he can cast Thorny Shield, which will cause him to burrow underground and shoot out spikes on his outer shell, making him nearly invulnerable. The crypt lord can also summon two creature types out of his body: carrion scarabs, tough melee fighters, and a locust swarm, which will follow and surround units, issuing constant damage.

No new Undead units are done yet, but Blizzard did tell us about two new abilities for existing ones. First, crypt fiends can now burrow, like *StarCraft*'s zerglings, remaining hidden to all enemies but air units. Second, necromancers can now raise skeletal mages along with skeletal warriors, providing an extra layer of ranged attack.

ORCS

Finally, the new Orc hero is the shadow hunter, a troll "island voodoo master," primarily designed to provide backup healing and defensive support—an early-game weakness of the Orcs in *WarCraft III*. Planned abilities include Hex, basically a variation on the *WarCraft II* Polymorph spell, which turns a targeted enemy unit into a random critter, such as a chicken, pig, or frog; Healing Wave, a powerful group-healing spell that casts a "chain of healing" among nearby friendly units; Serpent Wand, which summons a staff on the ground that serves as a temporary "tower" with a defensive range attack; and a fourth as-yet-unnamed spell that will render all nearby friendly units totally invulnerable until the hero is stunned or killed.

SHOP TILL YOU DROP

Along with the new units, each race will also get a player-buildable shop, with unique items to specifically aid each race. The Orc shop, for example, will have a healing salve for regenerating hit points, while the Night Elves' shop will sell moonstones, which immediately change the time to night. Blizzard is scattering several new items and power-ups throughout the maps as well, such as the Chest of Gold, which awards you an instant 250 gold; the Tome of Retraining, which lets you unspend skill points; and the Philosopher's Stone, which will change an item you select into a different, random item of the same level.

The Frozen Throne will introduce new neutral buildings, the most significant of which is the tavern, where neutral heroes—such as an Undead ranger—will lounge, available for purchase by any race. Tavern heroes will function like player-built heroes, with unique spells and abilities, and, once purchased, can be revived at your altar upon death. (At this point, Blizzard plans for neutral heroes to count towards your maximum hero limit—not supplement it.)

Numerous welcome gameplay tweaks are also in store, largely in response to user suggestions. You'll now have the ability to queue building construction—meaning, if you have the resources, you can effectively lay out your town in advance and order one worker unit to keep building it up. There's now much better pathfinding for flying units, which previously tended to get in each other's way, and, in a welcome bit of news for perennial Battle.net losers, a new handicap setting will allow you to reduce a better player's unit hit points in advance to even out the challenge.

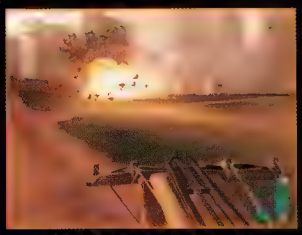
Speaking of Battle.net, *The Frozen Throne* will ship with as many new multiplayer maps as *WarCraft III* did, along with two new editing tools for the huge mapmaking community out there. The campaign editor supplements the world editor and will allow users to make their own contiguous campaign—linking maps together with a trigger system—that will appear on players' Custom Campaign menu. (Blizzard is including a sample custom campaign here—and that's where you get to play as the Orcs, whose role in the main story line was essentially done.) The spell effect editor lets mapmakers edit existing spells in the game for custom maps. You can only modify existing spells—you can't create new ones from scratch.

BLIZZARD OF INFO

Ugh. See? This is what happens when you try to report on a new Blizzard game, even just an expansion pack—it's a massive info download. And, really, this is just the beginning. Expect way more as *The Frozen Throne* gets closer to its spring 2003 release. And then expect hundreds of hours of addiction to follow.

SAVAGE™

Command Your Warriors



Or Engage In Battle

Real Time Strategy Shooter

COMING 2003

WWW.S2GAMES.COM

©2002 S2 Games, LLC. Savage is a trademark of S2 Games, LLC.
IGames is a trademark of IGames Publishing, LLC.

WHAT'S UP WITH WORLD OF WARCRAFT?

Coming up after *The Frozen Throne* is *World of WarCraft*—a total departure for both Blizzard and its strategy franchise. It's been more than a year since we first broke the story about Blizzard's foray into the MMORPG market [December 2001]. We hit them up to see where things are at now.

HOW FAR ALONG IS THE GAME NOW? I MEAN, HONESTLY? 5 PERCENT? 50 PERCENT? WHEN CAN WE EXPECT TO SEE A BETA?

Well, we have reached a number of significant milestones with the game, and we're on schedule to deliver a beta in the second half of 2003, but because we don't know how long we'll need to run the beta test, it's hard to say how far along the game is percentage-wise.

ARE YOU READY TO TELL US WHETHER THERE WILL BE NIGHT ELVES, UNDEAD, OR BURNING LEGION IN THE GAME—AND WHETHER WE CAN PLAY AS ANY OF THOSE RACES? IF NOT, WHY NOT?

We honestly can't say because we really haven't determined whether playing as these races could be implemented in a way that's totally fun for gamers. We're currently doing our best to make the game play as well as it can for the races we've announced so far (Tauren, Orcs, Dwarves, and Humans). No matter what, we're certainly not going to add races just to add them; we need to make sure that the social dynamics and gameplay mechanics make sense and provide for a fun and unique experience for each race and each character class in the game. That said, we are planning to do more races than we've currently announced.

WILL ANY OF THE CHARACTERS FROM WARCRAFT III BE IN WORLD OF WARCRAFT AS NPCS? WILL PLAYERS SEE SOME OF THE LEGENDARY FIGURES FROM THE STRATEGY GAMES?

Players who enjoyed the previous *WarCraft* games will find that they already recognize a good deal of what—not to mention whom—they'll be seeing in *World of WarCraft*. For instance, *WarCraft III* players will actually recognize a human barracks and town hall from the outside as soon as they see it, and for the first time, they'll be able to actually enter these buildings and see what sorts of activities take place inside.

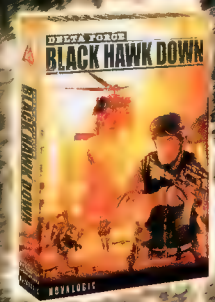
Outside the Dwarven city of Ironforge

Players will also encounter familiar story elements, units, and heroes from *WarCraft III*. Some of the units, such as the Orc shaman, have essentially become playable character classes in *World of WarCraft*, whereas others, such as the basic worker units, will show up as NPCs. One example of story and character continuity is Brann Bronzebeard, who has gone missing somewhere in the game world. Brann happens to be the brother of Muradin Bronzebeard, the Dwarven hero from *WarCraft III*'s single-player campaign.

HOW ABOUT TROLLS? ARE THEY IN THE GAME? CAN I BE A WITCH DOCTOR? OR AT LEAST GO TALK TO ONE?

Trolls are in the game—jungle trolls, to be precise—they're native to the region of Stranglethorn Vale. Trolls are such a significant part of *WarCraft* that it wouldn't be right to exclude them. Right now they're in the game as monsters, but it wouldn't be inconceivable to run into them as NPCs....As for witch doctors, you could probably go talk to one if you wanted to, but these days most people usually prefer general medicine over arcane magic. I suppose it depends on what ails you.

DELTA FORCE
BLACK HAWK DOWN



EXPERIENCE THE INTENSITY OF MODERN WARFARE

In Stores February 2003

Relentless Single & Multiplayer Combat

- Execute Compelling Missions with Multiple Objectives
- Fire Machine Guns from Black Hawks and Armored Vehicles
- Engage in Close Quarters Battle, Sniper and Air Attacks
- New, Challenging AI System • Nonstop Online Gaming

PLAYS BEST ON ALIENWARE

www.novalogic.com

Prima Strategy Guide Available!

NovaWorld

TEEN T — Violence, Blood

NOVALOGIC

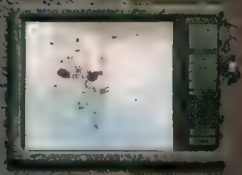
© 2003 NovaLogic, Inc. NovaLogic, the NovaLogic logo, NovaWorld and Delta Force are registered trademarks of NovaLogic, Inc. The Delta Force logo, Black Hawk Down and the NovaWorld logo are trademarks of NovaLogic, Inc. All other trademarks and logos are property of their respective owners

A NEW LAND BECKONS...
BUILD YOUR LEGACY!
The mysterious new land of Malas beckons with custom housing and powerful new skills. Build a unique house, take on the role of Paladin or Necromancer, and expand your quest in the Internet's deepest role-playing experience.
Ultima Online™: Age of Shadows™. Lead the life you were born to live!
Ultima Online is a live game you play via the Internet allowing you to play with thousands of other users. AN INTERNET CONNECTION IS REQUIRED TO PLAY. Internet service providers usually charge a monthly fee to provide this access. ELECTRONIC ARTS CHARGES A MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION FEE FOR THIS ONLINE PRODUCT, separate from your Internet access charges. YOU MUST BE 13 TO REGISTER FOR THIS GAME. Online gameplay subject to the Ultima Online License Agreement.
© 2002 Electronic Arts Inc. Ultima, Ultima Online, Age of Shadows, the UO logo, Origin, the Origin logo, EA GAMES and the EA GAMES logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Electronic Arts Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. All rights reserved. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. EA GAMES™ and Origin™ are Electronic Arts™ brands.

MALAS
Ultima Online: Age of Shadows is the only online RPG with customizable housing.
Acquire powerful new skills in two professions: Paladin and Necromancer.
Find new adventures and over 40,000 new housing plots in the new land of Malas.
Dry Highlands
Ultima Online
Age of Shadows
RATING PENDING
RP
Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
PC
ORIGIN
EA GAMES

OPERATION FLASHPOINT™

GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION



"YOU CAN'T DO BETTER THAN OPERATION FLASHPOINT"
Games Extreme

"ONE OF THE MOST COMPLETE SHOOTERS EVER"
IGN

"BUY NOW PLAY OFTEN"
Game Informer

MATURE M
Blood
Violence

PC CD

The million selling #1 bestseller

GAME OF THE YEAR

ONE MILLION RECRUITS

AND COUNTING...

3 GREAT GAMES

COLD WAR CRISIS
ORIGINAL GAME CAMPAIGN
RED HAMMER
THE SOVIET CAMPAIGN
RESISTANCE
OFFICIAL EXPANSION PACK

IN ONE BOX

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION

For the first time all 3 campaigns of the Cold War's darkest chapter are brought together in one box, in the most complete combat simulation ever.

- 3 deep compelling storylines.
- More than 100 incredible missions through campaigns and single player sorties.
- 26 addictive LAN & Internet multiplay missions.
- Command squads of crack troops.
- Drive & fly over 50 authentic vehicles and aircraft.
- Battle across 4 sprawling 100km² islands.

...JOIN NOW

For more info, game demos and downloads visit www.codemasters.com/flashpoint

Bohemia Interactive Studio

Codemasters®
GENIUS AT PLAY™

The GOD of Lionhead

Peter Molyneux breeds his next brood of virtual beasts and dreams of making you a movie mogul

BY JOHN HOULIHAN

Peter Molyneux has control issues. How else can you explain his virtual offspring? The celebrated designer has made games that let you design dungeons, torture your subjects, unleash hell on your enemies, smack creatures around, and generally play god in games ranging from *Populous* to *Theme Park* to *Black & White*. A man with such warped vision is bound to have serious psychological problems that can only be solved by designing more games. But since Molyneux's pain may be our gain, we trekked to the U.K.'s Lionhead Studios to see what he's building next. We found him in the midst of mad digital alchemy, creating yet another world that lets you be as good or bad as you want to be.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTIN THOMPSON

Playing god

Black & White was one of 2001's most innovative titles—and biggest disappointments. It had a cool world and it let you raise your own demigod, but those creatures started out no smarter than baboons. Ironically, *B&W* was actually listed in the 2002 Guinness Book of Records for having the most intelligent creature A.I. But, despite healthy sales and an add-on, you can't say the game was an unqualified success.

"I think we did a criminal job on some things and a bad job on others, but we certainly got some things right," says Molyneux. Perhaps the game was simply a victim of its own ambition. It was created entirely from scratch while Molyneux was simultaneously starting up Lionhead. But with the lessons learned from the first game and the company now well established, Molyneux is ready to redeem himself.

"We want to make a big leap with *Black & White 2*. We've decided to re-write virtually every aspect of the game," he says. The original *B&W* simply wasn't epic enough in scale for Peter's tastes. Sure, you played a god, but you didn't really *feel* like a god. "[The new game] will make people feel all-powerful. The single-player game has to be totally epic and it has to enable you to define what you're like as a player and what your creature will be like." A look at the frenzied pace around the studio indicates Peter's minions are certainly hard at work bringing their master's vision to life.

Run! It's Godzilla!

The not-so-cowardly lion strikes a pose.

Gameplay tip No. 1: Don't piss off the giant tiger god.

God is in the details

What hasn't changed is the lofty premise of the game, as you reprise the role of an all-powerful deity. Each successive episode (there are five planned in all) moves closer to our own age. While the original was set in an innocent, Eden-like paradise, *B&W2* introduces a more mature world that's feeling the ravages of war. How you choose to deal with that will form the central core of the game, a theme Molyneux believes closely echoes our modern conceptions of good and evil.

Although still early in development, *B&W2* is already starting to display some tantalizing glimpses of what prospective deities will enjoy. The engine alone promises to be 16 times more detailed, and some of the key technological advances are quickly shaping up.

The idea of the world changing to reflect your godly nature is pivotal; everything in the game world will now instantly warp in response to your divine touch. Followers of good see trees and flowers blossoming under their influence, while the hands of evil spray forth choking weeds and pestilence. There's some spectacular new cloud and weather effects, but easily the most stunning development is the new water engine, with photorealistic seas boiling and seething or responding calmly according to your divine nature.

But forget the eye candy. The important part is how you'll be able to express your true nature in the sequel. For the evil side, it's all about building up armies, conquering and destroying towns. If someone begs for mercy, it's just another opportunity to defile them in more disgusting ways. If you're good, it's all about protecting and improving your followers' lives.

There's a definite story line involving your creatures and the townsfolk, but you'll find fewer required challenges and a lot more evolving gameplay. "Some of the original rewards did piss people off," says Molyneux. "Now, you'll earn blueprints, which are used for things like spells, buildings, and technology. We've also introduced a currency. The missionaries return as shopkeepers, and you'll be able buy different rewards."

Of course, towns remain the focus for your followers. Instead of demanding food, wood, or new ore resources every

STAY ALERT!

Your next step could be your last.

VIETCONG™

U.S. SPECIAL FORCES IN VIETNAM

GET THE DEMO AT
www.vietcong-game.com

Gathering Developers

POWERED BY gamespy

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information

© 2002 Illusion Softworks and Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. All rights reserved. All other trademarks, logos and copyrights are property of their respective owners.

Tired of waiting for *The Two Towers* DVD, Molyneux created his own epic battles.

five seconds, you'll keep them content by simply protecting and nurturing them (or pillaging and flaying them, depending on your level of sadism).

The wrath of god

City walls are a new and vital development in this process, helping to define your territory and provide shelter as you advance from hick village to seething metropolis. You'll need those walls, too, once battles start to erupt. We watched as two Norse and Greek armies clashed, while archers poured arrow fire from the walls above. In our demo, the zoom function was so detailed that we could make out individual faces, sword cuts, and even arrows sticking out of our minions. You'll still be able to directly intervene via your godly powers, but the magic system has been slimmed and refined. "Everyday" miracles like fireballs and water remain, but if you can progress enough to build a wonder, you'll unleash one of six epic spells, vast *Populous*-style catastrophes with earthquakes rending entire continents and mighty volcanoes pouring molten lava down on unbelieving heretics.

Earthquakes, floods, and rain of fire are all well and good, but nothing beats releasing your creature upon the masses. As in *B&W*, the behemoth you raise from a pup will remain a primary influence on the world–but boy, has he grown up. In *B&W2*, he's matured in terms of looks, abilities, and higher brain functions. He certainly learns faster, and you'll now be able to directly choose which actions to reward him for and which to punish. You can even employ chocolate drops, baseball bats, and nailed sticks to hammer home particularly important life lessons. As Peter puts it, "The thing about being a god is that you have to [be able to] laugh. The laughs will come by being overly cruel to your creature and the world, or being overly nice, if you want to be."

Your creature will also interact more directly with your followers, helping them to develop and defend their town, and ultimately learning sophisticated strategies he'll use to lead them in battle. It'll be nice to have one more ally rather than one more hand to hold. You can build your monstrosity a home, and he understands all about possessions and toys, even throwing a hilarious tantrum when anyone messes with them. The overall number of creatures has been chopped to five (including ape, tiger, lion, and cow), but this has upped the levels of customization and sophistication. The new ape model now sports a full coat of individual hairs and a defined muscle structure. Depending on how you raise your characters, there are two entirely different detailed models: Raised well, your creature looks positively benign and compassionate, while his evil alter-ego is a howling, red-eyed King Kong on crack.

HIS EVIL ALTER-EGO IS A HOWLING, RED-EYED KING KONG ON CRACK.

When will the messiah return? The team still has a ton of work and many important decisions ahead: Will single-player and multiplayer games be bundled together? Will there be add-ons and tool sets? Will Molyneux stay out of an asylum until the game is finished? All good questions. Until we can start whipping our new creature into shape, it's in the hands of the gods at Lionhead.

The Movies

Lionhead's other major PC project is a game that puts you in the director's chair. You're a cigar-chomping Hollywood mogul who's responsible for guiding your studio from the golden age of the 1920s to modern-day big-budget blockbusters and beyond. Launching your studio on a small back lot during the silent era, you need to design and build sets, hire directors and crew, choose a script, and sign or discover some A-list talent before you actually get to yell "Action!" Each movie you make will generate its own unique trailer, which can be saved to your hard drive or posted on a website for your adoring public. Golden statue or golden turkey? It's up to the choices you make, but critical success and box office takings are the ultimate path to an Academy nomination or a prestigious lifetime achievement award.

Whether you decide to shoot epic, high-style spaghetti westerns or Ed Wood-influenced sci-fi schlock, you'll constantly push the bounds of taste and decency just like the early studios did, with each script influenced by violence, romance, and realism. Can you deliver the first screen kiss and get away with Tarantino-style bloodbaths in the '50s, or will you fall afoul of the censors' cut? It's a constant search for the right balance that'll get you the big box-office take. You'll also be able to develop new technologies like color, 3D, and the hilarious Smellovision, in hopes of beguiling a voracious moviegoing public.

Managing the careers and massaging the egos of your stars is also a concern as you try to coax out an Oscar-winning performance. Let's hope you do better than the MGM guy who said, "Can't act, can't sing, balding, can dance a little," about Fred Astaire's screen test. *The Movies* was in preproduction when we saw it at this year's European gaming show, but it's already displaying Molyneux's trademark originality and off-the-wall humor.

Unreal TOURNAMENT 2003

www.unrealtournament2003.com

THE YEAR'S MOST ACCLAIMED SHOOTER.

"...beyond anything you've seen before...it's the new face of futuristic combat"
– PC Gamer

"This is unquestionably the most graphically stunning shooter to date."
– GameSpy

"Unreal Tournament 2003 raises the bar for first-person PC action games."
– Philadelphia Inquirer

"Everyone's favorite shooter just got better"
– FHM

"... UT2003 looks effin' amazing."
– PC Gamer

BEST GRAPHICS: TECHNICAL

IGN.COM EDITORS' CHOICE AWARD

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Violence

DIGITAL XTREME

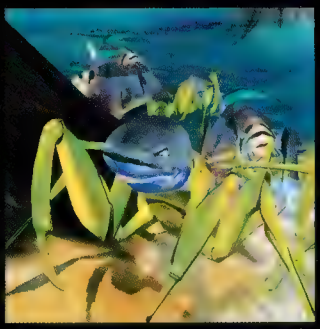
EPIC GAMES

PC CD ROM

Unreal ® Tournament 2003 © 2003 Epic Games, Inc. Raleigh, N.C. U.S.A. Unreal and the Unreal logo are registered trademarks of Epic Games, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. All other trademarks and trade names are the property of their respective owners. Unreal Tournament 2003 was created by Digital Extremes. Manufactured and marketed by Infogrames, Inc., New York, New York, a subsidiary of Infogrames Entertainment, S.A., under license from Epic Games, Inc.

ATARI

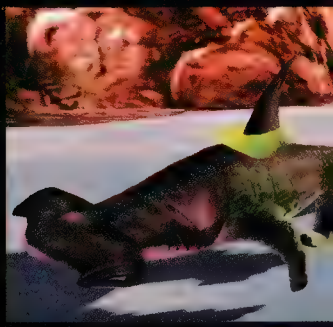
YOU'RE IN THE MIDST OF A PIRANHA TIGERS HAVE YOU

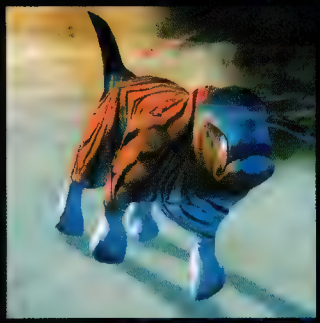


Bambito: It looks a little ridiculous, but pound for pound, the best aquatic fighter is definitely the Sharkantis...

That's right. Take a shark and breed it with a praying mantis.

Trust me. This thing will knock you out and bite your ear off.





Jack B. Quick: Shark Shark Shark.

If I hear another shark combo, I'll puke. When it comes to fighting in the water, the word "attrition" comes to mind. It's a numbers game.

I like to load up on piranhas and put them with a fast predatory feline. When you got an army of Piranha Tigers, you'll be King Neptune faster than you can say "Mermaid Sandwich." Get my drift??? :-)

Jack, Philosophy student, Portland, OR

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

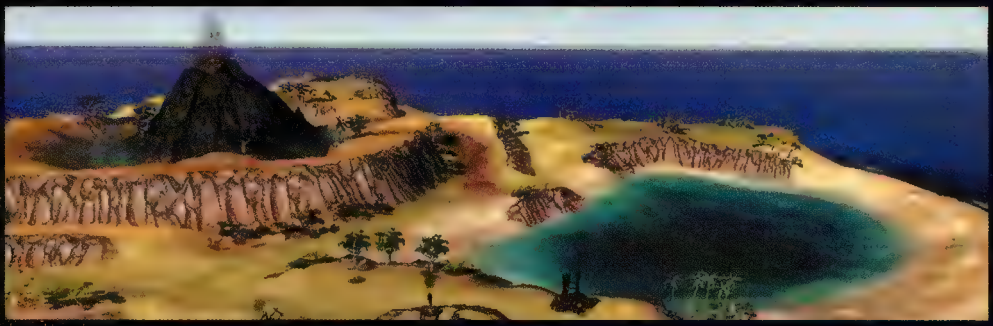
Violence
Comic Mischief

Microsoft game studios

relic

© 2003 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Microsoft, the Microsoft Game Studios logo, and Windows are either trademarks or registered trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. Impossible Creatures, the Impossible Creatures logo, Relic, the Relic logo, and the Relic Developer Network logo are either trademarks or registered trademarks of Relic Entertainment, Inc. in the United States and/or other countries. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association.

MASSIVE SEA BATTLE, AND SURROUNDED. NOW WHAT?



Traceyball: Ok sharks are good, but why mess with bugs when you can take something vicious and mix it with straight-up nastiness. Give me a hammerhead shark and a crocodile and I'll show you a mean machine.

In a 30 min. fight to the death, it's sink, swim or be devoured.

Looks like Jack B. Quick may be in for a nice and slow death. You hear me, Jack? You got nothing!

Tracey, 18 Wicked Bad Photographer, Boston

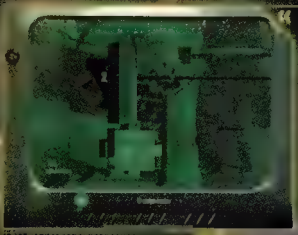
IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES™

A DIFFERENT KIND OF ANIMAL

Welcome to Impossible Creatures, the next real-time strategy game from the makers of Homeworld®. Get ready for a world where you create completely whacked-out mutant animals and then unleash them on your enemies. Fast-paced RTS action and dynamic 3D environments combined with over 40,000 possible animal creations equal combat like you've never seen. And with intense online multiplayer action, your opponents are as limitless as the creatures you create.

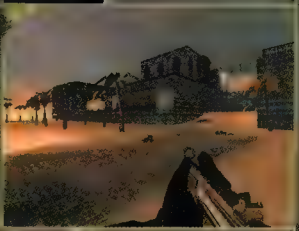
for more real time strategy, visit: www.microsoft.com/games/impossiblecreatures

SOME AGENTS HAVE A LICENSE TO KILL.
OTHERS ARE TOO BUSY TO FILE THE PAPERWORK.
CODEMASTERS.COM
Codemasters
GENIUS AT PLAY
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information
© 2002 The Codemasters Software Company Limited
Codemasters logo are registered trademarks owned by Codemasters.
of Codemasters. Published by Codemasters. "PlayStation" and the "PS"
Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, and the Xbox logos are either registered
in the U.S. and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft.
Interactive Digital Software Association. All other copyrights or trademarks are



Employ stealth and espionage or go in with all guns blazing—experience multiple styles of gameplay with high-tech equipment including a Zimotech GPS Map Computer and night vision goggles.

Take on intense missions in a world-spanning storyline through three massive theatres of combat—Russia, China and the Middle East.



Choose from a huge armory of 27 authentically reproduced weapons—from basic combat knives and sniper rifles to portable rocket launchers and proximity mines.

Operate a stability-sensitive weapons targeting system—experience the hostile environment of a battlezone.

Join forces with up to 16 combatants—objective-based online multiplayer gameplay allows for complex levels of team coordination.

I.G.I.-2

COVERT STRIKE

PC CD ROM

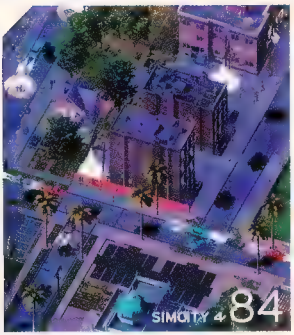
playstation 2
reviews
xbox
gamecube
play games
gameboy
demos
cheats
advance
news
message boards
immerse yourself in gaming
We've given you everything you wanted in print magazines.
Now we're expanding your world...
Online.
GAMERS.COM™
From the Editors of:
ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY
PlayStation
COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
GAMENOW
XBN
ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA

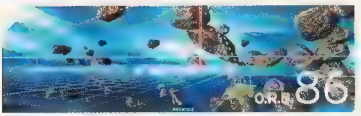
Reviews

We love games, we hate games **Edited by Robert Coffey**

The voice talent sounds more like Tyne Daly with a mouth full of meatloaf than it does like Pierce Brosnan.

JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE 98





INSIDE

82	Splinter Cell
84	SimCity 4
86	O.R.B.
88	Robin Hood: The Legend of Sherwood
90	Dragon's Lair 3D
92	Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings
94	Arx Fatalis
96	The Elder Scrolls III: Tribunal
97	Anarchy Online: Notum Wars
97	Revisionist History: Civilization III: Play the World
98	James Bond 007: NightFire
99	Platoon
100	Star Trek: Starfleet Command III
102	Soldiers of Anarchy
103	Deadly Dozen: Pacific Theater
104	G.I. Combat
104	World War II: Panzer Claws
105	Strike Fighters: Project 1
106	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003
106	Law & Order: Dead on the Money
107	RalliSport Challenge
108	Battle Realms: Winter of the Wolf
108	Zoo Tycoon: Marine Mania
109	Hegemonia
110	Astonia III
111	Reviews Index

Spectacular lighting offsets the jaggy, non-anti-aliased look of the game.

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell

Stalking the competition BY CHE CHOU

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER UBI SOFT DEVELOPER UBI SOFT MONTREAL GENRE THIRD-PERSON SNEAKER ESRB RATING TEEN: BLOOD AND GORE, VIOLENCE PRICE $49.99 REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 800, 256MB RAM, 1.5GB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 1GHZ, 2.1GB HARD DRIVE SPACE MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

As an Xbox thriller, *Splinter Cell* had the unenviable task last November of facing the formidable *Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance* for the "King of Stealth-Action Gaming" title. To the surprise of many, *Splinter Cell* actually delivered the goods, surpassing its competitor and becoming the darling of both consumers and critics. Comparisons between the two titles thus far are hardly surprising: Both games feature rugged, off-the-cuff lone wolves who operate in the realm of black ops and shadow governments. Both encourage stealth over violence, and when all peaceful options have been exhausted, give you plenty of high-tech (and old-school) ways to dispose of your enemies. But that's where the similarities end. While *MGS* injects the player with a heady dose of character development and conspiracy narrative, *SC* sticks to what it knows best: gameplay. Combine *SC*'s pure stealth action with the politically paranoid world of Tom Clancy and you've got one hell of a techno-espionage title made even better on the PC.

Tom Clancy sans Jack Ryan

SC opens with main man Sam Fisher waxing poetic about the burden of his Fifth Freedom the freedom to do whatever's necessary to defend America from terrorist threat. He alone must infiltrate, spy, and assassinate, while you alone must control Mr. Fisher, via mouse and keyboard, through nine sorties in settings ranging from Georgian police stations and Chinese embassies to CIA headquarters and besieged oil rigs. Set in a near-future scenario where ex-Soviet satellite states threaten to go rogue, *SC* stars Sam Fisher, an aging field operative called back into service to head up Third Echelon, a new, covert arm of the National Security Agency. Typical of a Clancy novel, there are more plot twists, high-tech threats, and Russian surnames than you can shake a Kalashnikov rifle at. Sadly, the Clancy-

Combine *Splinter Cell*'s pure stealth action with the world of Tom Clancy and you've got one hell of a techno-espionage title made even better on the PC.

Many of *SC*'s greatest moments are like this: No one knows you're there, you have a great spot and a visibility advantage, and you're about to start shooting heads left and right.

This is the first stealth-action game that lets you use human shields when the going gets rough.

Sam Fisher coyly peers past the elevator door to see if anyone's about.

It's easier to use the mouse than the console's analog stick for aiming your rifle.

esque complexity in the story line does little to pull players into the game. Unlike books, which have the luxury of prose to develop their premises, *SC* ushers you briskly through its unfolding mystery, destroying much of the story's mystique in the process.

Luckily, while the plot fails to properly thicken, the gameplay doesn't disappoint. Building upon *MGS*' third-person stealth mechanics, *SC* expands its gameplay repertoire by infusing the hide-and-go-seek elements from the *Thief* series with the strategic gadgetry of *Deus Ex*. Not only are you sneaking around, but you're doing it in the dark, with night-vision goggles, fiber-optic wire cameras, and prototype weaponry. *SC*'s brilliance lies in the way the various aspects of the game unite to compliment its central theme: stealth action

Being a ghost's shadow

As a stealth-action adventure, *Splinter Cell* is untouchable when it comes to letting you live out your secret agent fantasies. Staying out of sight is Fisher's prime directive; missions are easiest when conducted, quite literally, in the shadows. An onscreen visibility meter lets you know just how hard it is for enemies to spot you, making stealth-work less of a guessing game and more of a science. Some of the best moments in the game come in the form of heart-pounding, face-to-face encounters with guards who pass within inches of your position, only to look straight through you and into the dark abyss.

Other ways to avoid combat include hoisting and wrapping yourself onto ceiling pipes, shimmying up poles to take higher ground, or busting out with a split-jump to get the drop on enemies when the time is right. Got a bad feeling about what's on the other side of that door? Push it slightly ajar to take a peek inside, or better yet, get a worm's-eye view with your fiber-optic wire-cam Most levels are open-ended enough to allow both impulse commandos and closet pacifists to create their own styles of play. Even better is how *SC* integrates its rich eye-candy and immersive surround sound directly into the core gameplay. Aside from looking incredibly photographic, the game's excellent light-sourcing and dynamic shadows serve as both sanctuaries for the predator and a potential warning system for tangos lurking around corners. How fast you move determines how much noise you make; creep along slowly and stay off bits of broken glass (or other loose debris) to minimize the racket and stalk your prey.

We could argue that *Splinter Cell* is still heavily script-driven, often resulting in much trial-and-error playing, or that given its PC-centric save-anywhere-anytime system, the game is on the easy side. We could bitch about how, despite its sharp photorealistic graphics, the game still lacks built-in anti-aliasing for a less jagged look, or lament about how Sam Fisher's standard 5.7mm sidearm has about as much stopping power as a water weenie. But we won't, because that would be missing the big, gorgeous, and utterly compelling picture. This is, hands-down, one of the best stealth-action games on the PC. Don't have an Xbox? You still don't need one.

VERDICT ★★★★★

No need to get an Xbox to play one of the best stealth-action games ever.

A true day/night [illegible] to the simulation depth when the ebb and flow of the shops close, street lights [illegible] other details like the repair crew fixing the road on the left.

SimCity 4

A fresh and gorgeous take on the classic series—for computers able to run it BY THOMAS L. MCDONALD

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EA/MAXIS
DEVELOPER: MAXIS
GENRE: STRATEGY
ESRB RATING: EVERYONE
PRICE: $49.95
REQ. REMIXES: PENTIUM III 500, 128MB RAM, 1GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 16MB 3D CARD RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 4 2GHZ, 256MB RAM, GEFORCE 4 VIDEOCARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE

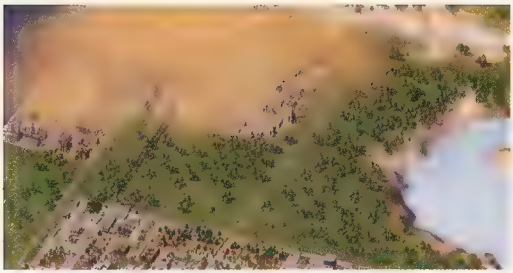
The Sims may be a cultural phenomena and the best-selling game in PC history, but for Maxis and designer Will Wright, *SimCity* remains their flagship. Despite 14 years and almost a dozen spin-off titles, it remains as fresh and compelling as ever. Maxis updates the graphics and refines the gameplay every few years, but it never deviates from the core design. This perennial blooms again in *SimCity 4*, with a deeper sense of simulation humming beneath instantly familiar gameplay

The largest, most welcome change is the region view, which lets you see massive overhead maps that connect cities within them. Several regional maps—including New York, London, Berlin, and San Francisco—are divided into varyingly sized squares. Each square is a city that can be developed independently, just like any slice of *SimCity* terrain. When you build roads to the edge of a *SimCity* map, you have the option to connect to the neighboring cities of the larger region. These cities are all linked to a shared economy, with people and money flowing across the entire network.

The other major change is the visual element, and Maxis has pulled out all the stops. As you would expect, the game has never looked better, and we're not just talking about higher resolutions and better models. Maxis uses the visual element to create a deeper sense of simulation. Zooming in superclose, you can see that each structure has its own personality, with props that create a wildly diverse panorama. But beauty has a price. On a 2GHz with 256MB of RAM and a GeForce 3, the game still chugged, even with most of the special effects turned off. By midgame, the slowdown led to hiccups with each view change.

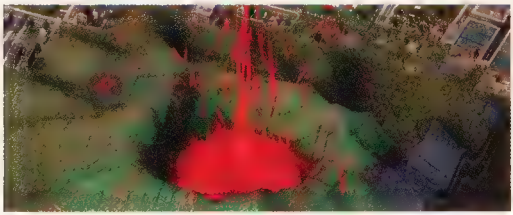
While the visual element is the gravy, the tools are the meat, and these have largely remained the same. Although the toolbar has been given the rounded look of *The Sims* interface, the overlays, development bars, charts, palettes, and zoning tools will be familiar to *SimCity* vets. Each new city begins in God mode, allowing you to edit the terrain and environment. The game contains the usual collection of terrain tools (raise, lower, level, and so on), but with only

The shift in emphasis to tending the whims of your Sims has left the economic model a bit shaky.

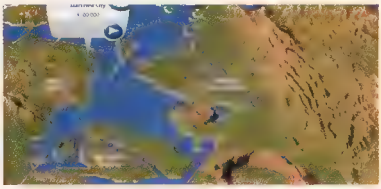


Elements notably lacking in *SimCity 4* are scenario missions and prebuilt cities, aside from a few lightly developed squares in the Berlin region.

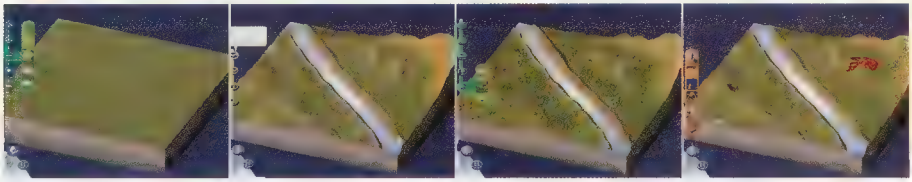
Improper zoning or a poor transportation infrastructure can leave entire blocks of Sims out of work, although a robot attack does wonders to lower the jobless rate.



As always, disasters provide relief from late-game doldrums, as you judiciously wreak vengeance on select areas of your city.



The region view enables gamers to design cities with a larger plan in mind, creating individual blocks of high-density urban construction, suburbs, industry, and farmland as cities and tying them together into a regional development network.



Although you can't edit terrain in the region view, you can edit each city for free in God mode before entering Mayor mode. When used with reconcile edges, this allows you to create a regional landscape one city at a time.

three brush sizes, they lack finesse. More welcome are the erosion tools, which soften the hard edges and give fresh terrain an aged feeling. In this mode, you can even paint the landscape with animals and trees.

From a functional standpoint, Mayor mode remains the least changed. Each game begins as it always has, with infrastructure, zoning, budget, and service options. The new zoning tool will likely irritate some, since it actually draws in the streets for each block. In theory, this technique is a welcome way to make sure all properties have street access without the block-counting hassle from previous *SimCity* games, but it doesn't always work. Sometimes the computer's street layout decisions are just plain bizarre, resulting in widowed lots that are inaccessible from the road. Although I never found any way to turn it off, I did learn to work with it by laying out a master street grid before zoning, then letting the zoning tool fill in side streets.

The game has a subtly different fee due to the way it creates neighborhoods and shifts the emphasis from increasing real-estate values to serving the needs of your citizens. This is made more personal by the ability to track the lives of individual Sims as they go about their daily routine, work, move, get sick, and generally complain a lot. There seems to be a problem at the very core of the simulation, however. Previous *SimCity* economic models were so ingrained that you almost always knew what to do to raise income. The series has long modeled a Reagan-esque Laffer Curve, punishing tax increases and rewarding tax cuts, but this time it seems more mercurial. Finding that balance of growth, services, and even margina profitability proves more difficult than ever before. The shift in emphasis to tending the whims of your Sims has left the economic model a bit shaky.

Some other modest flakiness keeps the game from perfection. There are crashes, although nothing so persistent as to make it unplayable, and the function that is supposed to let you manually go to the site of an emergency always landed me somewhere at the edge of the map instead. I also had a devil of a time with my water infrastructure, with almost continuous pipe bursts in several maps.

But on the whole, *SimCity 4* delivers exactly what it should: familiar core gameplay, a significant visual upgrade, and new features that expand gameplay without unbalancing the game. Some old strategies may not work, but there's plenty to tinker with as you learn the new rules of being mayor.

VERDICT ★★★★½

It looks beautiful and includes terrific new gameplay elements, but it runs like a dog.

O.R.B. (Off-world Resource Base)

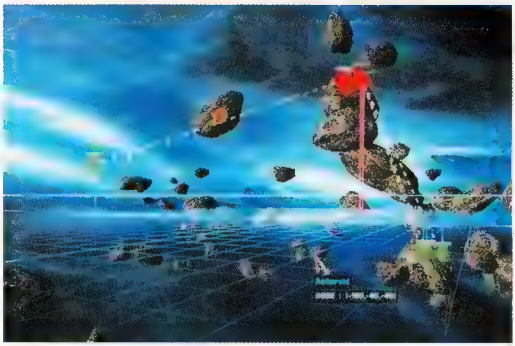
In space, no one can hear you yawn BY RICK ERNST

GAME STATS

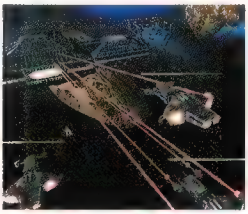
PUBLISHER: STRATEGY FIRST
DEVELOPER: STRATEGY FIRST
GENRE: 3D SPACE RTS
ESRB RATING: EVERYONE
PRICE: 39.99 REQUIREMENTS:
PENTIUM III 600, 128MB RAM, 500MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 16MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
PENTIUM III 1GHZ, 32MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT:
LAN, INTERNET (2-4 PLAYERS)

Every once in a while, a game turns an established genre on its head by taking a fresh approach to some part of a stale formula. The RTS genre was stumbling under the weight of *Command & Conquer* clones when *Homeworld* amazed gamers with a fully 3D space environment that was surprisingly easy to navigate. Three years later, Strategy First brings us *O.R.B.* (which stands for "Off-world Resource Base"), and returns to the fine tradition of imitating an innovative game while simultaneously removing almost everything that made the original great.

O.R.B.'s problems start before you even install the game. Though many game manuals are purely extraneous, RTS manuals are often a treasure trove of information about the units and structures you can build. Not so with *O.R.B.*, where we're treated to nine pages of backstory involving a holy war between two faceless alien races,



Though *O.R.B.* sports a beautiful 3D engine, most of the time, you interact with 2D icons.



Game over, as three destroyers justify their enormous research-and-build cost.

conflicting translations of a holy text, and a short phrase book of the alien languages. There's no list of units or bases, and the technology tree succeeds only in being dense enough to qualify as one of the most unreadable references of its kind.

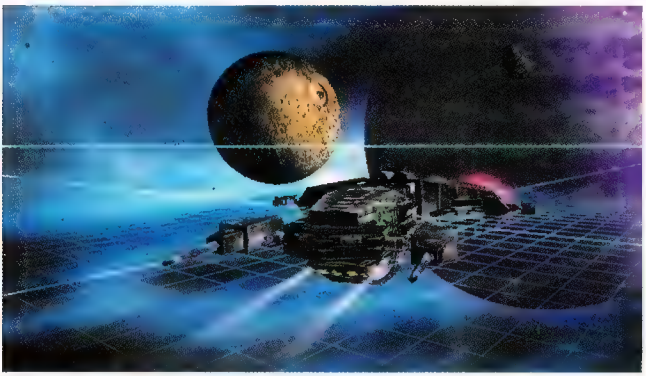
Things improve after installation, but only slightly. The interface is clean, but it requires far too many mouse-clicks to accomplish anything. The cinematics are well rendered, but the story itself is uninteresting. And the lack of any characters makes it difficult to empathize with either warring faction.

The tutorial, however, is strong, and does a fine job of explaining the basics of the game and its controls. Sadly, the developers seem to have abandoned everything that worked in *Homeworld* in favor of an arcane collection of onscreen buttons, mouse-keyboard combinations, and odd key chords. After a period of adjustment, the controls are adequate but frustrating for anyone who has played *Homeworld* and knows it can be done better.

To the developer's credit, the game *does* look very nice. The ships are detailed and the backdrops are rich and colorful. Unfortunately, the scale is such that you will seldom—if ever—see your smaller ships as anything but icons. One area where *O.R.B.* does excel is the maps: Instead of being largely empty space, most mission maps are filled with asteroids, planets, and moons, all of which are very impressive.

Graphics aside, the final nail in *O.R.B.*'s coffin is its pace. Ships crawl across the screen, and even at triple speed (as fast as it gets), it seems to take an eternity for anything to navigate the map. While waiting for my ships to hammer an opposing starbase into submission, I actually got up and had a snack. Who needs a Pause button, anyway?

A game that too closely imitates a hit title will quickly be dismissed as a blatant knock-off, but in abandoning too many of the quality elements of *Homeworld*, *O.R.B.* falls considerably short of its 3-year-old predecessor.



Gorgeous planets and moons make for very cool environments.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A *Homeworld* clone that abandons much of what that game did right.

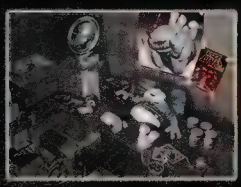
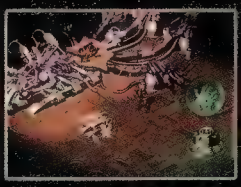
ANARCHY RULES ON THE GIANT SLAVE SHIP HARBINGER
AS VARIOUS FACTIONS FIGHT FOR CONTROL.

THROUGH THE CHAOS, RESOLVE YOUR DESTINY...

...AND CLAIM THE ULTIMATE REWARD.
YOUR FREEDOM.

HARBINGER™

THE REVOLUTION LIES WITHIN

T — TEEN — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
BLOOD
USE OF DRUGS
VIOLENCE

PC CD ROM

· INTENSE ACTION RPG
· IMMENSE GAME ASSETS
· UNIQUE SCI-FI STORYLINE

WWW.HARBINGERGAME.COM

SILVERBACK ENTERTAINMENT

DREAMCATCHER

Software © 2003 Silverback Entertainment/DreamCatcher Interactive Inc. DreamCatcher design and mark are trademarks of DreamCatcher Interactive Inc. All other brands, product names and logos are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. All Rights Reserved.

Robin Hood: The Legend of Sherwood

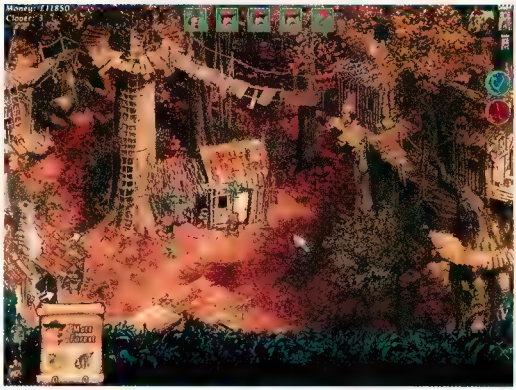
Flashing blades, derring-do, great heaping piles of gold BY RICK ERNST

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER STRATEGY FIRST
DEVELOPER SPELLBOUND STUDIOS GENRE STRATEGY
ESRB RATING TEEN PRICE $44.99
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 233, 64MB RAM, 900MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS NONE
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

Good stories make good games. The very best games allow players to create their own stories while providing the framework that gives the stories a larger context. *Robin Hood: The Legend of Sherwood* takes as its framework the famous story of an outlawed noble fighting a tyrannical sheriff, which is the perfect setting for the players' own stories of daring rescues, bold ambushes, and swashbuckling high adventure.

Robin Hood is a strategy game focusing on small groups of individuals. The game begins with Robin alone after returning from the Crusades, but he soon recruits other heroes like Friar Tuck, Little John, and Will Scarlet, as well as an ever-growing number of rank-and-file outlaws to fill out his little band. Each mission may involve up to five members of Robin's Merry Men, and objectives can range from ambushing tax collectors to rescuing imprisoned allies to defending a besieged castle.



Robin's secret hide-out in Sherwood Forest.

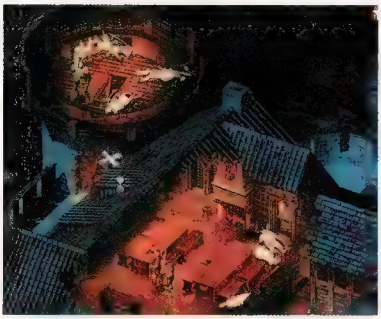
It's the perfect setting for the players' own stories of daring rescues, bold ambushes, and swashbuckling high adventure.

Each hero and outlaw possesses a number of skills that makes it possible to carry out the dangerous missions. Robin, for example, can KO guards with a single punch, climb walls, leap from rooftop to rooftop, and throw purses of coins to distract greedy soldiers. On the other hand, Stutley, who created the hidden base in Sherwood, can pick locks, throw nets to capture or apples to distract, and disguise himself as a beggar.

There are also three types of Merry Men, each with a unique selection of abilities. Picking the right team for a mission is key to success, though there are any number of good strategies for each assignment. Sometimes taking the best fighters and rushing the front door will work just fine, but more often stealth, teamwork, and clever distractions will win the day.

The missions themselves are varied and fun. Often players are given a choice of tasks, so depending on which characters are currently on the mend, players can choose a mission that best suits their available skills. Merry Men who stay behind will construct supplies like arrows, nets, and healing herbs. In a refreshing twist, the number of Merry Men that join Robin's fight is directly related to the number of people left alive after a mission. Spare a guard's life and he may join the band. Get too bloodthirsty, and the Merry Men will decide Robin is no better than the sheriff and desert.

Visually the game is very pretty, with lush 2D environments, detailed characters, and good animation. The music, sound effects, and voice acting are all high quality, creating a rich environment and giving the player plenty of feedback on his current situation. You can hear guards talking or raising the alarm, and the music deftly highlights dangerous situations.



All in a night's work.

Robin leaps across the rooftops in Nottingham.

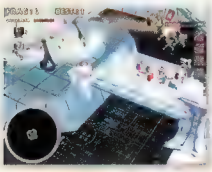
It's tough to find much to fault. It is possible to lose track of characters behind tall buildings, and it would have been fantastic to have a multiplayer cooperative mode. But these are minor issues, and I can highly recommend *Robin Hood* to anyone who enjoys devilishly clever plans and swashbuckling adventure.

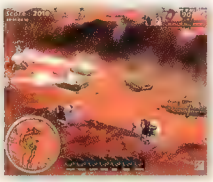
VERDICT ★★★★½

A fresh, deep, and (most important) fun new squad-based strategy game.

THE GLADIATORS
GALACTIC CIRCUS GAMES

EASY TO PLAY
HARD TO SURVIVE





"...vibrant graphics...quick action... An interesting alternative to more traditional real-time strategy games"
-Gamespot

"An impressive game"
-PC Zone

Release March 2003

Experience The Gladiators for yourself at
http://thegladiators.arxeltribe.com

arxel tribe

TRI SYNERGY

PC CD ROM

The Gladiators © 2002 Eugen Systems/The Arxel Guild. All rights reserved.

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information

Dragon's Lair 3D: Return to the Lair

The 3 Ds—Dirk, Daphne, and Dragon—are back in action BY CHARLES ARDAI

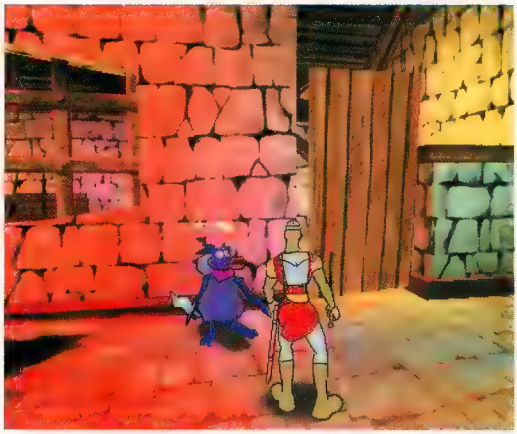
GAME STATS

PUBLISHER UBI SOFT
DEVELOPER DRAGONSTONE SOFTWARE GENRE ACTION ESRB RATING TEEN; MILD VIOLENCE
PRICE $29.99 REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 300, 64MB RAM, 700MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III, 128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

Dragon's Lair is probably the best-loved bad game of all time. As iconic, in its way, as *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders*, Don Bluth's laser-disc creation was the first to feature movie-quality graphics, and the novelty was so compelling that plenty of people were willing to line up to play the thing—even though it was no fun at all, a torture of split-second timing and mind-numbing repetition. How does *Dragon's Lair 3D* stack up? Well, it's easily the best yet, in the sense that it's the first *Dragon's Lair* you generally won't hate playing.

Like the original, the new game casts you as an oafish knight who has to run a gauntlet of death traps in order to find and rescue a kidnapped princess. Also like the original, the game is basically linear: Each room represents a new way for you to die horribly unless you find just the right set of moves to escape it. This time, the rooms are rendered in 3D (though Dirk the Daring still isn't), and the moves you have to make sometimes involve solving clever platform-game puzzles. There's still a lot of repetition, though, due in part to the fact that you sometimes aren't allowed to save in the middle of a sequence. I'd like to tell you how many times I had to replay the scene with the robot knight and the chessboard floor, but I can't—I lost count. (The game's idea of fun is to force you to cross the electrified floor not once or twice, but three times, all without saving and without dying.)

When you are allowed to save in mid-challenge, as in the entertaining level where you cross a yawning abyss by jumping from one moving platform to another, you can enjoy the designers' sadistic ingenuity. But even here, there are problems. The geniuses who picked the keyboard controls chose Alt as the button for jumping, resulting (on my system, at least) in getting booted out of the game as if I'd Alt-Tab'd each time I attempted a forward jump. Fortunately, you can re-map the controls to other keys, something you'll have to do anyway if you want to manipulate all the keyboard controls while controlling the mouse with the other. Even doing this doesn't help you, though, in the periodic scenes where mouse control mysteriously vanishes and you're left steering a sluggish and unresponsive Dirk with the cursor keys alone. Is this a bug? I hope so—that someone might do it to you on purpose is unthinkable.

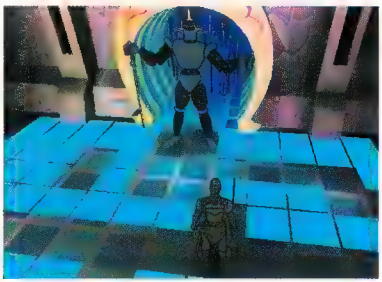


The hero, the environments, the gameplay, and even the silly bad guys are all back.

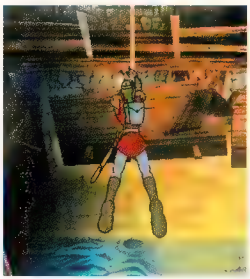
It's the first *Dragon's Lair* game that you generally won't hate playing.

The game's aesthetics are similarly uneven. The painted backgrounds are very nice, but many of the foreground characters are sparsely drawn and lack depth. The music sounds like the soundtrack to a Saturday-morning cartoon from the 1980s—I leave it up to you whether or not to take that as a compliment. The voice actress who delivers Daphne's lines makes Betty Boop sound like James Earl Jones. I turned off my speakers halfway through the game and didn't regret it.

For all these weaknesses, *Dragon's Lair 3D* does offer something satisfying to those of us who grew up wishing the original had been better. *Dragon's Lair 3D* may be a minor game—and to the extent that it's buggy and poorly designed, a disappointing one—but it's actually a step forward for this series.



A midsequence save in this and countless other encounters would make *Dragon's Lair 3D* more of a game and less of a chore.



Deep down inside, *Dragon's Lair 3D* is still a basic platform game.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A better game than the 1983 original, but how much is that saying?

WARNING!!

A NEW MAGAZINE HAS BEEN DETECTED!!

GENESIS → **GMR** IS A NEW SPECIES OF MAGAZINE. IT WAS BRED TO BE THE BEST MONTHLY BUYING GUIDE FOR VIDEO GAMES.
EVOLUTION → **GMR** WILL GROW TO BECOME THE INDISPENSIBLE VOICE FOR ALL GAMERS IN NEED OF A SECOND OPINION WHEN BUYING THEIR NEXT GAME.
POWERS → **GMR'S** VAST ARSENAL OF WEAPONS ARE THE LATEST NEWS AND REVIEWS OF ALL GAMES ON-SALE NOW. IT COVERS ALL FORMATS, INCLUDING PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE, GBA AND PC. IT IS CONSIDERED A SIGNIFICANT THREAT TO LESSER GAMES MAGAZINES.
KNOWN HABITAT → **GMR** CAN BE FOUND AT ALL STORES BEARING THIS SIGN:

EB GAMES
electronics boutique

RECOMMENDED RESPONSE → IF **GMR** IS SPOTTED, IT IS ADVISED THAT YOU PURCHASE A COPY OR SIGN-UP FOR A SUBSCRIPTION IMMEDIATELY.

//end transmission//

LOOK OUT...

...IT'S GOING TO BE BIG.

ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA

POWERED BY → **ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA.** THE SAME PEOPLE WHO BRING YOU E.LECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY, COMPUTER GAMING WORLD, OFFICIAL U.S PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE, GAMENOW AND XBOX NATION

Vault dungeons have more interesting layouts, enemies, and neat loot all around. Oh, and the graphics of me getting beaten up are pretty, too.

Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings

Microsoft presents a very special episode of... BY THIERRY NGUYEN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAMES STUDIOS DEVELOPER TURBINE ENTERTAINMENT GENRE MMORPG ESRB RATING MATURE, BLOOD, VIOLENCE PRICE $49.99, $12.95 PER MONTH AFTER THE FIRST FREE MONTH REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 733, 256MB RAM, 2GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, INTERNET CONNECTION RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS BROADBAND INTERNET CONNECTION MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT AS MUCH AS THE INTERNET WILL ALLOW

Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings doesn't start with a bang, but rather, the quiet moments after the bang. That bang—the Devastation in the game fiction—has left the world of the original *AC* a post-apocalyptic nightmare. It is the job of you and a few thousand other players to rebuild the gameworld as completely as Turbine has rebuilt their game.

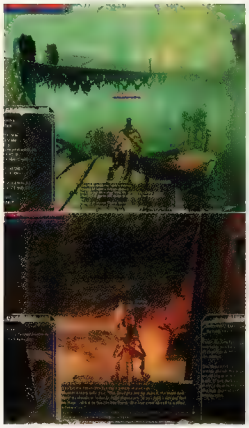
However, much of *AC2* is still dedicated to the "hack-'n'-yak" gameplay of other MMORPGs, albeit with tweaks—most of them for the better. For example, vault dungeons supplement traditional loot-and-critter-filled dungeons. These require both finding special glyphs for entry and killing a boss monster to exit a portal—which then doles out a piece of game lore via cut-scene. Why should anyone but fan-fiction nerds sit through these plot nuggets? Because the vaults offer players the most experience points—often enough to gain an entire level. Alas, like too many MMORPG dungeons, vaults are frequently crowded. Sometimes you're lucky and can get through one unharassed; other times you have to wait your turn to fight the boss monster, like some sort of Disneyland ride line simulator.

The packed vaults contrast sharply with the overall game world which, at press time, still feels barren and desolate. Even on the most populous server, other players were few and far between, with most congregating either in the ruined towns or dungeons. Other games have stretches of loneliness, but it's more pronounced in *AC2*: I often wandered through large chunks of the landscape without seeing another soul.

Ye skills to pay thine bills

In keeping with the whole post-apocalypse motif, *AC2*'s virtual society forgoes NPC merchants, opting instead for a player economy based on an intriguing crafting system. *AC2*'s crafting system is the most playable in any MMORPG so far, not asking the player to burn experience making clothing and forks. Instead, all you need is the right recipe and the items that possess the traits to fulfill the recipe. This system is easy to use and develop; the downside is that it's a bit hard to be a dedicated

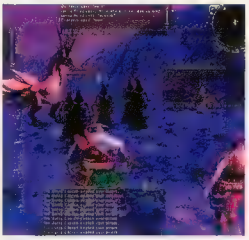
Vaults offer players a wealth of experience points—often enough to gain an entire level.



The starter dungeon, before and after the monthly episode update. Note the addition of NPCs, the revised chat window, and the different locale.

You still need to use portals to navigate the world. Save yourself a big headache, and go to the Web to plot your route from place to place.

One of the more unique classes in *AC2*, the tactician can make walls and turrets, making him a valuable group player.



You need to declare a kingdom, which allows you to use specific skills like summoning shadows. You develop these skills by killing other players.

One way to help your crafting skill is to mash the items together near a forge, which gives a bonus to crafting skills.

crafter. Even with resource nodes, players often need to get resources from the bodies of dead enemies, hence requiring combat in order to excel at craftwork. Still, this is the first MMORPG in which I didn't mind making my own junk.

Crafting is just one part of a large skill tree that has five other basic branches—melee, missile, magic, miscellaneous, and player-versus-player skills. Every time you level, you can spend skill points to learn a new skill; after learning a skill, you can spend separately tracked experience to develop it. Later, you can actually untrain it, regaining skill points to spend on another skill.

AC2 renounces *EverQuest*'s harsh death penalty as a frustrating game mechanic and instead makes death a mere annoyance. When you die, you get a vitae penalty, which just means that your maximum health and vigor are reduced and you have to gain experience to restore your vitae.

Same time, same channel

Maintaining an *AC* tradition, *AC2* will provide new content every month via monthly episodes. For the most part, the monthly episode is a success. At launch, the new character experience was a very informative, newbie-friendly, yet boring tutorial—with a dash of the surrea offered by giant stone heads that command you to kill random vermin and fix statues.

The first monthly episode added NPC guides and a minor plot with drudges (ubiquitous menacing catmen) attacking your home. Additionally, new quests after this beginning do a good job of teaching crafting skills and getting players to around Level 10 by the time the quests are completed. Other major changes for the positive include chat window renovations, new ways to get loot in dungeons, and skill tweaks.

There are a few problems, some easily fixed, others not. There's no easy way to find other players for the purpose of grouping—no "/Who" command like *EQ*'s or *Dark Age of Camelot*'s Looking-for-Group function. The game taxes your hard drive; I often found my freshly-defragged and spacious hard drive churning like mad while running around the game world. I didn't run into much lag myself, but there have been vociferous complaints about bad lag, especially in more populated areas.

Despite all the cool tweaks and additions, the repetitive gameplay still nags at me. But Turbine is committed to creating interesting monthly episodes, and if they manage to both fix the problems and keep the game interesting, then *AC2* will be a worthy successor.

VERDICT ★★★★½

A strong next-generation MMORPG with monthly episodes that should make it even better.

This giant worm is one of the most dramatic monsters in the game.

Arx Fatalis

Kill trolls in a land down under BY ROBERT COFFEY

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: JOWOOD PRODUCTIONS
DEVELOPER: ARKANE STUDIOS
GENRE: ROLE-PLAYING GAME
ESRB RATING: MATURE: BLOOD AND GORE, VIOLENCE
PRICE: $39.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 500, 64MB RAM, 750MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 4, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE

It wouldn't take a whole lot of effort to dismiss *Arx Fatalis*. The box is ugly. The name is dopey. It's a blatant *Ultima Underworld* wannabe. It's got a French development team. OK, that's all true, but so are some other things. It has a richly drawn, interesting gameworld. It gives the player more than enough choices to create a unique play experience. It sounds great, it looks even better, and it's the most original RPG not named *Morrowind* released in 2002. You simply can't be a fan of RPGs and not play this game.

A brilliant diamond...

Arx Fatalis unfolds slowly; the story, your character, and the game world patiently develop in tandem with the almost painstaking nature of your own exploration. The world of *Arx* exists entirely underground (indeed, it's the desire to see the sun again that drives the plot), and it takes awhile to get your bearings in the tangled network of tunnels bored throughout nine sprawling levels. Other games would struggle to maintain interest with such a leisurely pace, but *Arx* keeps you engaged with interesting characters (like a melancholy troll sculptor longing for a friend), graphics much sharper than a subterranean game would lead you to expect, and an intricately crafted game fiction where every faction, from the snakewomen to the goblins, has its own agenda.

How you choose to navigate this world is up to you. Your amnesiac character begins as a blank slate, and you develop him not by choosing some restrictive character class, but by augmenting a variety of skills (like close combat, stealth, intuition, and more) every time you level up. While it's not as responsive as *Morrowind*'s use-based system, the *Arx* character system lets you create whatever hybrid you desire. I personally developed a bruising fighter with significant–but limited–spell aptitude. Nothing backs up a poisoned two-handed sword quite as well as a couple of fireballs.

All the potential "classes" are pretty well balanced for play throughout the game, and they allow you to solve quests in different ways. Well, up to the very end, when the purest mages, thieves, and ranged attackers might have trouble due to the need to use a special sword to kill the end boss.

The most original RPG not named *Morrowind* released in 2002.

No, it's not *Black & White*—just a similar magic system.

Let's see, great big ice-breathing dragon...yup, it's an RPG.

Combat is a straightforward, first-person affair. There's not a lot of variety in opponents, with an awful lot of rats, spiders, and zombies filling up *Arx*'s tunnels. Still, the opponents are generally challenging, requiring smart timing to make your blows connect—unless you're casting spells.

Spell casters are going to have to make some adjustments in order to enjoy *Arx Fatalis*, but they're adjustments well worth making. Spells are cast by drawing a series of runes in the air. This adds a true skill component as you cast spells in real time during battle. Fortunately, you can pre-cast and save up to three hotkeyed spells for later use; even better, the spells are generally pretty devastating—late in the game, you can take out some of the most vicious enemies with two moderate fireballs.

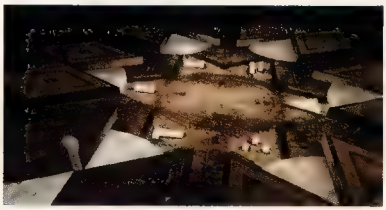
...pockmarked with fractures

With so many things going for this game, it's unfortunate that so many niggling elements are laced throughout to tick you off. The biggest culprit is the interface, with an inventory window that insists on opening every time you look at your character sheet, journal, or map, and then refuses to close when you close your character sheet, journal, or map, and because it's open, you can't move normally, and once you close it you put away your readied weapon for no reason, and wait, it looks like your weapon is ready now but it isn't because you're not attacking, you're dying, and, oh, there it is finally, oops, you're dead. Time to reload.

What else? The use of inventory items is inconsistent, the journal *always* reopens on the first page (not the most recent one you looked at), you can't annotate the map or journal, your character's voice is so subdued that you sometimes miss key information that then won't be recorded in your journal, you often have no idea where to go (no one will help you, either), and time apparently passes but there's no way to monitor it. These things—and a few others—will get on your nerves more than once.

And yet, from the daunting puzzles to the combat to a game design that lets you brew your own potions and bake a very tasty apple pie, what you're left with at the end of *Arx Fatalis* is a sense of great satisfaction. This is a game that soundly triumphs over its shortcomings to deliver hours and hours of enjoyment.

It may not be the snazziest or deepest character system ever, but when you consider that you'll be lucky to reach Level 8, every development decision you make matters.



There aren't a lot of them, but the puzzles in *Arx* are all challenging.

ENCHANTING THE KOLTK SWORD

With only three dragon's eggs and even less mithril in the game, you can't afford to experiment with enchanting the meteor sword; without it, you won't even reach the final boss, let alone kill him. Unless your magic is more than 80, don't try casting Enchant yourself—you'll only get a misleadingly glowing sword. Instead, use an Enchant Scroll (buy one earlier from the twin traders), or have Zainashh at the snakewomen's outpost do it for you—but you'll have to sell out Alia and the rebels for her to do it.

With the sword properly enchanted, you'll trigger the fight with the bearer of the final Akbaa stone, and you'll be able to chop up Yserbius as well.

VERDICT ★★★★½

The happiest surprise of the year, *Arx Fatalis* is a great RPG, rough edges and all.

The Elder Scrolls III: Tribunal

Morrowind's first expansion trades wide-open wilderness for deep dungeons BY RON DULIN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
DEVELOPER: BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
GENRE: ROLE-PLAYING GAME
ESRB RATING: TEEN; BLOOD, VIOLENCE
PRICE: $49.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 500, 128MB RAM (256MB RAM FOR WINDOWS XP), 1GB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 800, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE

Morrowind was all about freedom. From the huge landscape to the seemingly endless supply of subplots, the best thing about *Morrowind* was exploring the massive world and complex society of Vvardenfell. So, it's somewhat strange that *Tribunal*, the first official expansion, is so confining: Most of your exploits are confined to a single city and its labyrinthine sewage system, as you solve quests and hack your way through an endless army of creatures new and old.

The expansion takes you to Mournhold, a moderately sized new city away from the continent of Vvardenfell. After installing the expansion, your character is asleep. When you awake, you'll be attacked by a mysterious assassin. A few Siltstrider trips and well-placed queries later, you'll be teleported to Mournhold. Though you'll find the factions of Vvardenfell almost entirely absent in Mournhold, you will find a city beset by political tensions resulting from a new king at odds with the local temple. And you can perform tasks and gain favor with either of these factions.

There are also an impressive number of interesting side quests. Almost everyone in Mournhold has a task for you, ranging from helping a smithy find an apprentice to taking a lead role in a theatrical production with precious little time to prepare. One strange quest starts with a particularly pushy beggar and ends with one of the toughest fights you'll ever face.

Although there isn't a vast area to explore, the city of Mournhold looks good, with massive statues and fountains between the palace and the temple. It's a big chunk of territory, but the single location makes it feel more constraining than *Morrowind*'s wide-open wilderness. The city is also rather underpopulated. The upside of this is that the denizens of Mournhold have more personality than the often-generic NPCs on the mainland, and there are some characters, such as a scantily-clad barbarian, who are simply there as comic relief for players who have thoroughly explored the original.

The sewers under Mournhold are full of undead, so prepare to have your stats drained.

A few of *Morrowind*'s problems have been addressed. The journal has been modified, so you can sort quests by their titles. This isn't tremendously helpful because the title of a particular quest isn't always obvious, but it's an improvement over the unbearably messy journal in the original. You can also add your own notes to the maps, which is a real benefit. The problems that aren't addressed, though, are emphasized by the tight hallways and combat-heavy environs of Mournhold. Most notably, the combat system remains mindless and repetitive, and *Tribunal* puts a great deal of emphasis on combat with its more dungeon-oriented gameplay.

At least the enemies are more difficult. The new monsters—an army of goblins and a few undead—make for challenging opponents, and *Tribunal* is a great place for high-level characters to continue their adventures. The quests are engaging, but Mournhold is a noticeably different place from Vvardenfell. This is a more traditional role-playing game, tucked away in an isolated corner of *Morrowind*'s massive world.

Mournhold may be small, but at least it's well decorated.

VERDICT ★★★★½

Good for high-level adventurers who've somehow exhausted *Morrowind*, this expansion hits on both the strengths and weaknesses of the first game.

It takes some tough hombres to defend a base properly.

Anarchy Online: The Notum Wars

WWII Online meets sci-fi universe BY ANDREW BURWELL

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: FUNCOM
DEVELOPER: FUNCOM
GENRE: MMORPG
ESRB RATING: TEEN, BLOOD AND VIOLENCE PRICE: $19.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 450, 128MB RAM, 1.2GB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 4 1GHZ, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D CARD MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

A few months ago, to the dismay of many *Anarchy Online* subscribers, Funcom announced the delay of the *Shadow Lands* expansion. Instead, they'd be releasing *The Notum Wars*, a booster pack add-on. What was that? Who would want to pay for a mini-update? The answer came shortly after installing *Notum Wars*—any *AO* player would want this. More than a mini-update, it's a major change to the way *Anarchy Online* is played.

Notum Wars' biggest innovation is land control for organizations. The big advantage to having land and contro percentage of land held by your faction. So when I say there's a major change in the way *Anarchy Online* is played, I'm talking about the promotion of teamwork, I'm talking about fighting for a common cause, I'm talking about all-out mass player-versus player battles that you'll only see in the likes of *WWII Online*. In the early morning hours on the first day of release, the massive pitched battles of the Notum Wars began and *Anarchy Online* has been different ever since.

Land control isn't the only addition. Funcom has added new ground-based fighting vehicles, as well as visual

More than a mini-update, it's a major change to the way *Anarchy Online* is played.

towers is the stat bonuses you gain: organization-wide bonuses for all your org's towers, individual bonuses for any towers you own personally, and experience point bonuses based on the enhancements like starships taking off and landing on the planet's surface, and new weather effects. They've also rebuilt the character creation system and NPC chat interface, making it easy for anyone to join the MMORPG world.

Our towers have fallen, and they can't get up.

Notum Wars has renewed *Anarchy Online* with added play mechanics that other MMORPGs just don't have. If you haven't given this game a try, now's your chance. There's a free seven-day trial available online at www.anarchy-online.com.

VERDICT ★★★★½
Enhanced, updated, and all-around fantastic.

GAME PATCHES

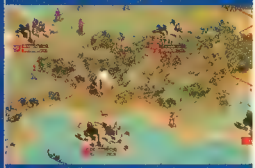
Revisionist History

Civilization III: Play the World

By Thomas L. McDonald

Last month I took Firaxis to the woodshed in what was definitely one of those "this-hurts-me-more-than-it-hurts-you" kind of moments, but the appalling quality of *Civilization III: Play the World* made the tough love mandatory. It would have been bad enough if they had merely fobbed off a bunch of maps largely culled from fan websites and a paltry few units and civs as extra content. But the main purpose of the add-on, multiplayer support, simply did not work. Much to their credit, Firaxis was quick to offer a couple of patches. They didn't really work all that well, but hey, at least we knew they were on the case.

Versions 1.01f, 1.04f, and 1.14f were



released in rapid succession. There is progress being made, but *Play the World* is still Play a Few People Slowly for a Little While. Firaxis has included a new autopatching function, which dedicated users will either greet with enthusiasm or dread. Or both.

The long and the short of it is this: As of patch 1.14f, drop-outs were far less persistent, but lag was still bordering on intolerable. Though games still have strange pauses and hiccups, at least you can play for longer stretches, which is progress. The problem of finding opponents remains, however.

And if you're on AOL...well, first of all, stop it, and get a new ISP. Until you do, don't bother with *Play the World*, it won't work. Firaxis blames this on AOL, which is a pretty safe bet since you can blame most of what's wrong with the world on them, and long-time PC users will simply nod sagely and agree.

Play the World is slowly shuffling towards usability, but as of 1.14f it's still not a pleasurable or problem free experience.

James Bond 007: NightFire

Crap. Total crap BY ROBERT COFFEY

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EA GAMES
DEVELOPER: GEARBOX SOFTWARE
GENRE: SHOOTER
ESRB RATING: TEEN; SUGGESTIVE THEMES, VIOLENCE
PRICE: $49.95
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 500, 128MB RAM, 675MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 1GHZ, 256MB RAM, 1.4GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 64MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-32 PLAYERS)

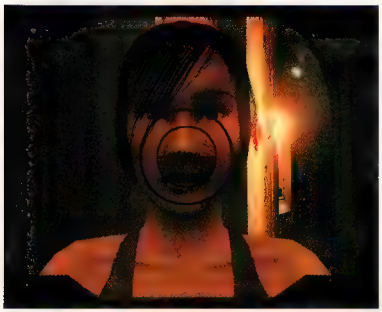
James Bond 007: NightFire is probably the most successful educational game I have ever played. Gearbox Software is to be commended for the incredibly clever implementation of Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' seminal work *On Death and Dying*, specifically the good doctor's five stages of dying. By playing through *NightFire*, the intrepid gamer is able to experience an agonizing demise without ever truly risking mortality. All that really dies in *NightFire* are joy, pleasure, and a small part of your soul—a small price to pay for such a great lesson on misery. While it is tempting to think that Gearbox Software simply released the most incompetently crafted shooter in living memory, *NightFire*'s uncanny and unrelenting march through the five stages is too spot-on for its excruciating journey to be anything other than psychological genius. To wit:

Denial: Are those A.I. bad guys really just staring at the wall and not reacting to my gunfire? Are there truly no hot-keys for my weapons so that I must waste time and probably die while I cycle past the useless flashbang grenades for a gun? Are there only three types of weapons: lousy, lousier, and pointless? There's no way that every level in this game can be ripped off from other, better games. No, no, I refuse to accept that a corporate behemoth such as Electronic Arts would knowingly charge $50 for such garbage. It can't be!

The best part about killing bad guys is watching their corpses inexplicably melt away into the floor.

Simply the most incompetently crafted shooter in living memory.

The ultra-swanky exclusive high-class art opening features the following spread: two shrimp cocktails and ten crackers with red paste and black paste.



Super-Spy Sneakiness 101: When working undercover, it is perfectly acceptable to press your nose against your subject and use your cunning lighter/spycam—they'll never notice the difference.

Anger: Why do I have to "Use" this friggin' door 20 times before it opens when every other door opens with one? And where did my damn targeting reticule go? Probably into the same limbo my ammo info went. How come only the console versions of the game get the cool vehicular chases? These bosses suck—they're ridiculously bulletproof, they cheat, and they flit around like mosquitoes on crack. Go to hell, *NightFire*, go to hell and burn.

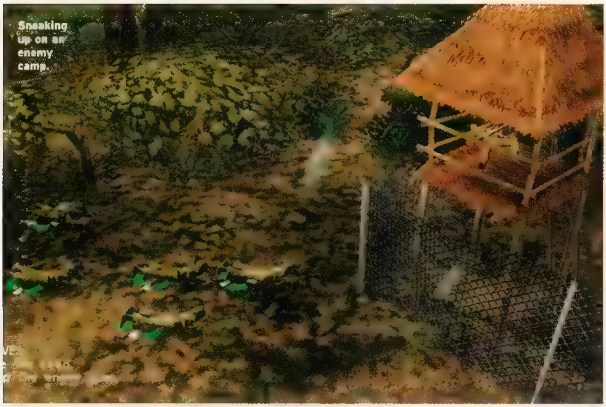
Bargaining: Please be a game-killing bug, please be a game-killing bug, please please please and I promise never to steal my neighbor's cable again. Dammit. It's not a bug. I guess I should have just figured that after needing to blow up the five parked vans with rockets that the heavily armored van speeding around with the side door open and the passenger who's shooting the mini-gun who won't die no matter how much I shoot him, that van will only blow up if I shoot it with bullets. Please, God, release me from my suffering.

Depression: This game isn't as bad as I thought—it's worse. The flattest multiplayer shooter I've ever played, horribly flat and ugly levels in spite of the *Quake III* engine, horrendous cut-scenes that look like *Thunderbirds* shot through a lens smeared with Vaseline, and voice talent that sounds more like Tyne Daly with a mouth full of meatloaf than it does Pierce Brosnan. How could they do this to James Bond? Oh, the humanity.

Acceptance: 15 hours in and, mercifully, the end is nigh. The henchman really do keep shouting, "I'm taking fire!" even when I'm hiding and not shooting at them. I may have a license to kill but I can't jump or climb over a knee-high railing. And apparently I can't walk smoothly over carpeting—I tend to lurch as the framerate drops for some reason. But that's okay. It really is. I understand. You can take me, God. I'm ready to go toward the light.

VERDICT ★★★★★

As a shooter, *NightFire* is an abject failure. As a slow painful death simulator, *NightFire* is a resounding success.


Sneaking up on an enemy camp.

Platoon

No Academy Award here BY JONAH JACKSON

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER STRATEGY FIRST DEVELOPER MONTE CRISTO GAMES GENRE REAL-TIME TACTICAL ESRB RATING TEEN; VIOLENCE PRICE $39.99 REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 600, 256MB RAM, 600MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 900, 64MB 3D CARD MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, INTERNET (2 PLAYERS)

A 15-year-old film about America's most controversial war seen through the eyes of an equally controversial director might seem like an odd choice for a videogame license, but that didn't stop Hungarian developer Monte Cristo from turning Oliver Stone's brooding film into a real-time tactical game. The result is a disturbing combination of poor control and frustrating, repetitive gameplay that feels more like a guerrilla *Groundhog Day* than *Platoon*.

The single-player campaign is a series of 12 missions encompassing three years in the tour of duty of Martin Lionsdale. Players guide squads of fixed-unit composition through each mission, completing combat, reconnaissance, and tactical objectives. Most time is spent simply surviving a series of well-entrenched ambushes. The enemy soldiers are always alert and waiting, and battles are short and deadly. Catching the enemy by surprise is often a matter of luck or, more likely, of replaying the mission so many times you've memorized the map. Contributing to this "replay value" is the lack of an in-mission save-game feature. If you find yourself killed by the last remaining Vietcong, your only choice is to start over, micromanaging your units through every firefight, minefield, and belly crawl again.

Control, both of the camera and individual units, is awkward. The terrain is three-dimensional, and views are often obscured. Map rotation is a clunky afterthought that wasn't fully implemented (the manual says as much). Pathfinding is also something of a mystery: There is no indication of your unit's intended route to a destination, and soldiers sometimes wander into the open for no discernable reason. Worse, if you select an unreachable destination, units will walk to some random, often exposed, nearby location.

The story line, meant to add depth and plot to the campaign structure, is simplistic and manages to be mildly offensive as well. The intro movie sets this tone immediately featuring a cartoonishly evil Vietcong soldier who eventually guns down a lone, frightened American. Maybe it's the awkward dialogue or the series of doe-eyed and often incoherent letters written home by Lionsdale, but the whole thing feels like it was written by someone without much of an understanding of English or what Vietnam meant to America. *Platoon* does get high marks for graphics and animation, and for a soundtrack that is clever without being obvious, but most everything else is a muddled, incomplete mess.

VERDICT ★★★★★

***Platoon* the game is every bit as bad as you'd expect it to be.**

THINK YOU COULD ROCK THE TECH WORLD?

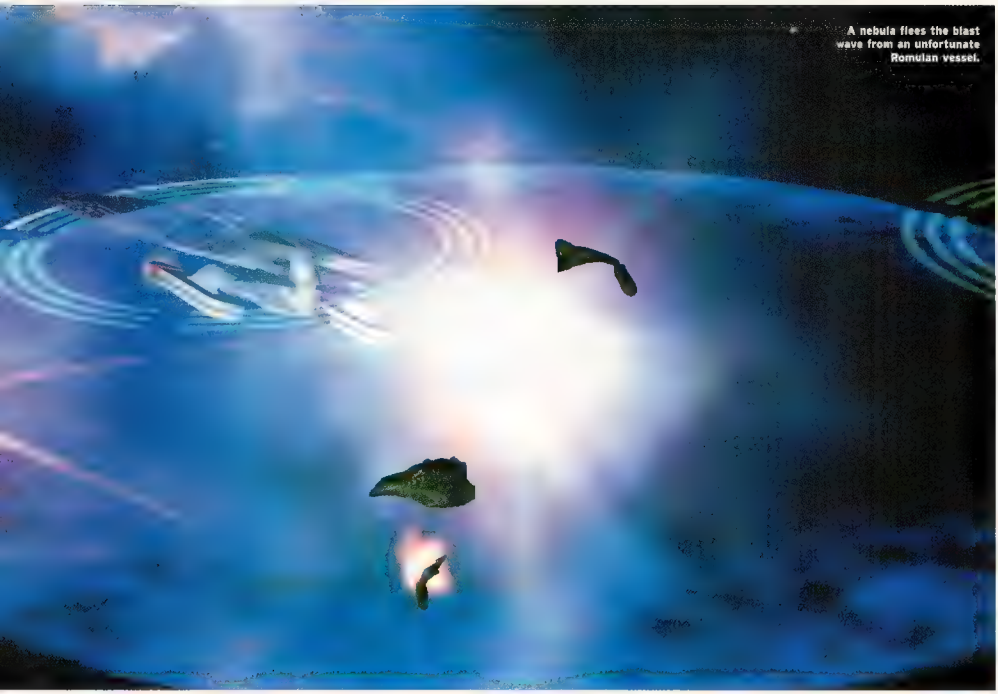
Prove it.

> A real college degree, focused on advancing technology

game design
video production
digital animation
network security
e-commerce
software engineering
technology management
multimedia
web design
database management

UAT University of Advancing Technology
Learn. Experience. Innovate.

www.uat.edu or 800.658.5744



A nebula flees the blast wave from an unfortunate Romulan vessel.

Star Trek: Starfleet Command III

"Picard to LaForge: Please repair Taldren's diagnostic scanners" BY T. BYRL BAKER

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER TALDREN
GENRE REAL-TIME TACTICAL WARGAME FOR TREK NERDS
ESRB RATING EVERYONE; VIOLENCE
PRICE $49.99
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 450, 128MB RAM, 650MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS NONE
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, INTERNET (2-128 PLAYERS IN DYNAVERSE, 2-6 PLAYERS IN SKIRMISH MODE)

With *Starfleet Command III*, Taldren finally gets a chance to boldly go where it hadn't dared to go before. The switch to the *Next Generation* timeline lets fans of that future universe command their own Federation galaxies and defiants, Romulan warbirds, and mighty Borg cubes; but it also lets the developers distance themselves a bit from the pen-and-paper *Star Fleet Battles* rules that have always driven this series.

Happily, they've capitalized on this newfound freedom to create a tactica combat engine that does an excellent job of re-creating the battles we see in the *Next Gen* television shows and big-screen flicks on which this game is based. Everything is streamlined and trimmed, dramatically improving accessibility without sacrificing many gameplay options. Electronic warfare is now abstracted and handled completely by crew A.I. Shield facings are reduced from six to four. There's a new tactical warp that lets ships engage and disengage from combat at high speed, and cloaked ships turn completely invisible until they are successfully pinged by an anti-cloak scan or probe. Unfortunately, this stellar tactical engine serves as the only highlight in a game with a lifeless campaign and enough technical problems to give Data a run for his money.

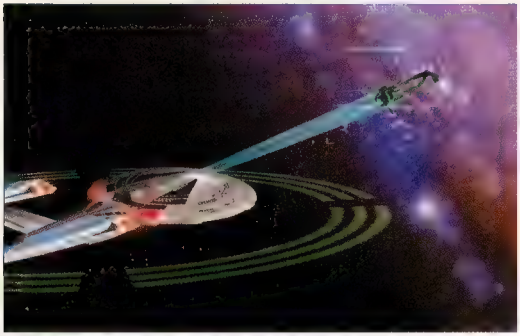
Calling in the favors

Ship customization is by far the biggest addition to the series, and for the most part it works wonderfully. Each successful mission in the single-player campaign earns you prestige, which is spent to requisition a more powerful ship or to heavily modify the ship you already have. You can only cram so much mass into each subsection of a particular hull, so you'll never see impossible things like a bird of prey sporting class ten shields. Weapon hardpoints and firing arcs are also fixed, so reasonable offensive loadouts are the rule rather than the exception.

In general, retrofits offer players several basic choices that add up to a complex whole. Max out the weapons and you overload the warp core. Upgrade that component to compensate

It's aggravating that *Starfleet Command III* is just a few patches away from being a good game.

This Romulan warbird has sacrificed top speed to accommodate a large warp core and top-notch thrusters that give it the turning ability of a much smaller vessel. Note that the mass for this subsection is maxed out.



A mighty sovereign-class ally holds a hapless Romulan shrike in its tractor beam as I maneuver to lend support.

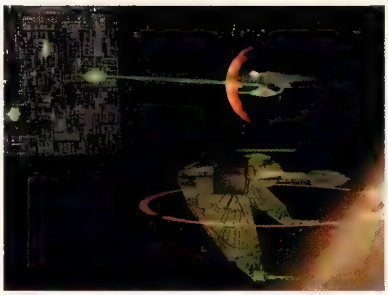
and you'll likely have to downgrade the ship's turning thrusters to make room, severely affecting maneuverability. The alternative is to use a smaller impulse engine, which cuts into the ship's top speed. Every bit of mass you add or remove affects the ship's performance, and it's possible to spend hours tweaking various rides to suit your fighting style or prepare for the mission at hand.

One of the reasons outfitting a ship takes so long is that absolutely no hard data is provided about range, power consumption, damage, or anything else relevant, aside from the component's cost and mass. Experimentation is easy because you can buy a component to see what it does and then remove it without losing any money in the process, but all this trouble could have been avoided by supplying an extra line or two of data for each component.

The rules for customizing ships can be bent somewhat by crew members who gradually level up after each successful mission. This carryover from the original *Starfleet Command* works well, especially once officers advance to Legendary status. Experienced crew members confer benefits like improved impulse-engine or warp-core output, more accurate targeting, and faster repair speeds. Their prestige value also rises steeply as they climb the ranks, making them valuable trading fodder when you need a little extra cash to upgrade your ship.

The real nemesis

It is patently obvious that this game was kicked out the door to beat the release of the *Star Trek: Nemesis* movie. Even if you are fortunate enough to avoid the random unhandled exception errors that simply cause the game to crash, you'll still have to deal with game-stopping scripting errors in the single-player story line. The dynamic single-player Conquest campaigns are also broken; they work perfectly when first started, but become completely static when loaded from a saved game. Then there are the problems that actually affect gameplay, like the fact you can automatically follow cloaked ships. If you have any interest at all in the campaign games, wait for the inevitable patch.



Few things are more dispiriting than watching your galaxy-class starship get assimilated by a Borg cube.

Legendary officers are so skilled they can take over for wounded comrades at other positions in a pinch.

It doesn't help matters that even when the dynamic campaign *does* work, it's boring. Games like *Medieval: Total War* have shown it's possible to mix detailed tactical combat with a rich, overarching strategic-campaign engine. Here, only the tactical portion is done right, and then only when you're talking about multiplayer skirmishes. The combat A.I. in the single-player missions is awful, and the only tense battles are those in which your ship is completely outclassed or outnumbered. Online, it's a different story, and players who feel they've developed solid tactics sparring with the A.I. should prepare to have their sizzling warp cores handed to them when facing human opposition.

It's aggravating that *Starfleet Command III* is just a few (albeit significant) patches away from being a good game. Unfortunately, there's a strong chance we'll have to rely on the fan community to nurse this ailing preemie back to health.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Those looking for a *Next Gen* fix should prepare to deal with the previous generation's problems.

Soldiers of Anarchy

Tastes like chicken BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: SIMON & SCHUSTER
DEVELOPER: SILVER STYLE
GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY
ESRB RATING: TEEN; BLOOD AND VIOLENCE
PRICE: $39.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 600, 128MB RAM, 600MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 800, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: INTERNET, LAN (2-8 PLAYERS)

If you've played *Fallout Tactics* or *Shadow Company*, you'll recognize *Soldiers of Anarchy*: It's basically the same game. OK, there are slight modifications here and there, but where the former two are solid games, *Soldiers of Anarchy* is a pretender that is neither overly terrible nor particularly good.

Like *Fallout Tactics*, *Soldiers of Anarchy* is a squad-based 3D strategy game focused on combat. The story unfolds as your team emerges from a Russian bunker after 10 years in isolation trying to escape a deadly virus. Your goal is simple: Uncover the secret behind the mystery virus that destroyed civilization, while collecting weapons, equipment, and vehicles for your depleted arsenal.

Each level begins with outfitting and equipping your team, then striking out from the protection of your bunker into a hostile world. Missions are linear and overly scripted; sometimes your team is forced to carry out objectives in the way the story dictates—or face dire consequence. As your team completes objectives, mostly through combat or the destruction of things, it'll bump into an interesting cast of seekers, slingers, and survivors willing to provide information—for a price.

The rather campy 1950s TV commercial-style dialogue may drive you bonkers, but get used to it. Your team cannot uncover the plot without helping these folks, usually by adding another objective or two to your already difficult mission. In the meantime, wild animals, bandits, rival gangs, and more attempt to hinder your team's investigation.

The best thing about *Soldiers of Anarchy* is the loads of weapons, vehicles, and aircraft. With more than 50 items to buy or steal, your team has access to M-60 machine guns, T-55 battle tanks, armored vehicles, Mi-24 helicopters, MiG-29 fighter jets, and humvees. As each mission progresses, your team has the opportunity to use whatever mode of transportation it wishes. Another interesting game facet is the ability to repair vehicles, tanks, and aircraft at the garage. The bunker's med lab is also useful. Here, team members get healed, manufacture and use super-steroids like fly pills, and test serums designed to help them survive the wild.

Unfortunately, *Soldiers of Anarchy* lacks the polish and performance of *Fallout Tactics*. The game is riddled with bugs that will bring your computer to a standstill. It's a sad state when the ReadMe document instructs players to save often. Just as bad are the incredibly long load times. You'll spend hours simply reloading saved games or going from level to level.

Unit pathfinding is similarly disappointing. At times you'll click on part of the map to move your team, and somehow one of your teammates will take a fatal alternate route. Vehicle pathfinding is even worse. And did I mention the nonintuitive camera controls? Let's just say that the camera work is clunky at best.

Soldiers of Anarchy does offer a mission editor and multiplayer game for online competition with up to eight players. But does this make the game worth playing? Maybe, if you're either extremely patient or a diehard fan of the RTS squad-based tactical genre. However, my advice is stick with *Fallout Tactics*. You'll thank me for the money you'll save.

VERDICT ★★★★★

You're better off replaying *Fallout Tactics* or scouring the bargain bins for *Shadow Company* than playing this pretender.

Here your team dons monk garb in order to sneak past the guards and into the city to investigate the source of the virus. Because they're unarmed, it's one of the least memorable missions of the game.

Blowing up bridges and towers is a handy skill. Make sure you use a soldier adept in demolitions before laying the explosives, or things may go boom before you want them to.

Tank alley. Using tanks and RPGs is a must if team members are going to take out enemy vehicles—otherwise, they're dead meat.

Vehicles such as this Sherman are interactive in some missions.

Deadly Dozen: Pacific Theater

Medal of Honor meets Dirty Dozen BY DI LUO

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: **INFOGRAMES**
DEVELOPER: **NFUSION**
GENRE: **ACTION** ESRB RATING: **TEEN, BLOOD, VIOLENCE**
PRICE: **$29.99** REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM II 550, 128MB RAM, 650MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 16MB 3D CARD** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM III 900, 32MB 3D CARD** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, INTERNET (2-32)**

Walking out in the open is an invitation for a sniper's bullet.

You're the few, the proud, the soldiers of the 1st Special Naval Force. With war in the Pacific raging, your unit has been selected to spearhead the campaign against Japan. Operating frequently behind enemy lines, your tasks will include sabotage, espionage, and even frontal assaults against enemy fortifications.

As the name suggests, this shooter focuses entirely upon the war with Japan. At the start of each mission, you pick a squad of up to four soldiers and choose their equipment before heading into battle. Each soldier has 11 attributes. While it's possible to complete the missions in multiple ways, stealth and sniping usually rule the day. To exploit your unit fully, you'll be able to switch between characters with ease during the mission.

The missions offer a variety of objectives. Unlike the heavily-scripted and linear *Medal of Honor, Pacific Theater* has more choices and allows for different approaches to the same problem. The game environments are quite believable, and the jungle scenery is more than window dressing. Heavy foliage gives practical benefits like cover and camouflage to you and your opponents, since walking out in the open is an invitation for a sniper's bullet. Enemy A.I. is challenging without being superhuman. They'll spot you if you charge headlong into them, and a well-placed shot can drop you with ease. Soldiers with high infiltration skills, however, can approach them silently and conduct very satisfying ambushes.

Most actions take place at a distance. Tangling with the enemy hand to hand usually leads to messy consequences.

Your teammates' A.I. is the most frustrating part of the game. Though they usually spot the enemy and fire without needing to be prompted, their pathfinding abilities rival that of a blind man without his stick. They'll often get stuck behind rocks and trees, and the use of a door is beyond their comprehension. You should also leave the "friendly fire" option off, as the A.I. usually fails to realize that shooting at the enemy must be done *around* you rather than *through* you.

Multiplayer exists in various modes, including co-op for all the missions. Unfortunately, it's quite unstable and finding other players online is difficult.

Despite these problems, *Pacific Theater* is still an enjoyable game. With its low price tag, it's definitely recommended for shooter fans with even an inkling of interest in WWII.

VERDICT ★★★½☆
Budget price with better-than-average gameplay.

G.I. Combat

In military terms, it's FUBAR BY JEFF LACKEY

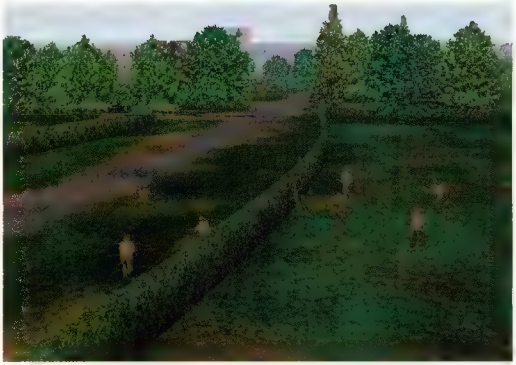
GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: STRATEGY FIRST
DEVELOPER: FREEDOM GAMES
GENRE: WARGAME
ESRB RATING: TEEN
PRICE: $39.95
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 500, 128MB RAM, 200MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: NONE
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2 PLAYERS)

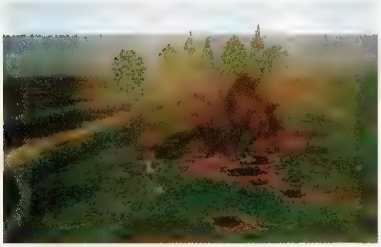
G.I. Combat has a promising concept: a real-time, 3D, tactical-level wargame set in WWII Normandy that was developed by the designers of the *Close Combat* series. It features an impressive list of things that wargamers yearn for, including a large variety of units, 3D environment, RPG elements, campaigns, a scenario editor, and multiplayer. Unfortunately, the experience falls far short of the promise.

The game has poor map navigation controls that, alone, wouldn't be too bad. But when you add that to a real-time game in which orders can't be given while paused, the result is extreme frustration as you frantically and clumsily search the map to discover who's being fired upon and how they're faring. Meanwhile, unit A.I. is pathetic. Squads ordered to hide behind a hedgerow or in a house sometimes leave men uncovered like sitting ducks; units blindly walk into fire rather than reacting by seeking cover and firing back; tanks spin in place as they try to maneuver. The flawed A.I. requires you to constantly micromanage every unit, but the few broad commands and poor map navigation controls prevent you from effectively accomplishing that. And just to make the experience complete, the game occasionally crashes (it did it for me on three different machines).

G.I. Combat's concept has potential, but version 1.0's execution is too flawed to recommend. The good news is that the developers appear to be committed to supporting and patching the title—check the support forums at www.gicombat.com to see if the game's problems are fixed before considering it as a purchase.



A lack of control and poor A.I. mean your troops will charge in without cover.



Mortar fire is unerring in its accuracy.

VERDICT ★★★★★
It's *Close Combat* gone 3D and gone bad.

World War II: Panzer Claws

Weird German monster! BY BRUCE GERYK

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EIDOS INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER: IN IMAGES
GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY
ESRB RATING: TEEN
PRICE: $40
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 450, 128MB RAM, 1.2GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 16MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 4 1GHZ, 256MB RAM, 128MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-8 PLAYERS)

If you were wondering about the unfortunate title of this game, in the Polish developer's native language, the name—*Pazury pancerne*—actually sounds much better. So, it turns out there's a simple explanation for that. Unfortunately, there isn't an explanation for a lot of other things, like the mandatory tutorial before you get to the campaigns, the wacky unit A.I., and the decision to make a game of this sort using an engine suited to anything but.

While the game itself was done by Kraków-based In Images, the engine is courtesy of Reality Pump Studios, who used it in its well-received *Earth 2150*. While it worked well there, it's wholly inappropriate for a pseudohistorical title, where its shiny, high-gloss look reminds you of all the *Star Trek* episodes where the Enterprise found a Nazi-like society led by a Hitler substitute with a symbol that looked kind of like a swastika but wasn't. The only time the game comes close to evoking WWII is in the cleverly done faux-newsreel footage that is a backdrop to the game credits.

Aesthetics aren't everything, of course, but in this case, they're not rescued by gameplay, which feels simultaneously derivative, generic, and frustrating. The unit A.I. can be quite aggressive (which gets your units killed), and the game moves very quickly, leading to a helter-skelter rhythm that further undermines the setting. Even this could be excused if the system had something new to offer, but the exaggerated rock/paper/scissors mechanics make this feel like a game made for no real good reason, except maybe for a place to put Gerd Hofmann and Joachim Schäfer's excellent musical score. That accounts for the extra half-star in the rating.

Campaigns are included for Allied, German, and Soviet forces.

VERDICT ★★★★½
An engine in search of a game.

Strike Fighters: Project 1

Not ready for takeoff BY JEFF LACKEY

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER STRATEGY FIRST
DEVELOPER THIRD WIRE PRODUCTIONS
GENRE FLIGHT SIM
ESRB RATING TEEN PRICE $39.99
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 400, 64MB RAM, 500MB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, INTERNET (2-16 PLAYERS)

While *Strike Fighters'* premature release to Wal-Mart a few months ago was greeted with virtual tomato throwing, it did give sim fans a tantalizing—if broken—taste of 1960s jet fighters. This was an age in which radar was crude, missiles were unreliable, and air battles were still eye-to-eye jousts. What sim fan wouldn't be excited by the idea of a simulation of this period released by the legendary developer of *European Air War* and *Longbow 2*? Sim fans with quality standards, that's who.

Numerous bugs and missing features indicate *Strike Fighters* was pushed out the door a few months before its time. Again.

The good news is that this "real" final version of *Strike Fighters* is a very good dog-fighting simulation; it's a fine representation of those venerable jets and their distinctive flight characteristics, primitive avionics, and weapons systems. Good enemy A.I., combined with the fact that the MiGs have a tighter horizontal turning radius than your jets, results in some sweat-inducing aerial battles.

The bad news is that numerous bugs and missing features indicate the game was pushed out the door a few months before its time. Again. Both the single missions and the campaign missions (a single campaign in a fictional desert country, between countries with U.S. and Russian armament) often involve air-to-ground strikes. Amazingly, there are absolutely no SAMs or AAA, no air defenses at all. This completely robs the air-to-ground missions of any tension or drama. Other obvious omissions include no explosions for many of the bombs, no ground damage (such as craters), wingmen refusing to attack ground targets, the rudder on the F-104 moving the plane in the wrong direction, and several key commands on the reference card being inoperable. In addition, the briefing map's lack of zoom reduces mission planning to simply picking your weapon load.

There's still hope for *Strike Fighters*, despite the premature release. The design is intentionally open for user mods, many of which are already appearing online, and the air-to-air mode is strong and enjoyable. Also, Third Wire is publicly committed to fixing the bugs and adding new features. Still, unless you really can't wait to fly and fight in the jets, your best bet is to wait until the game is patched up before purchasing it.

VERDICT ★★★★★

You'll need to wait a few months for bug fixes, polish, and good user-made mods for *Strike Fighters* to be worth your money.

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003

A golf game worthy of Tiger's name

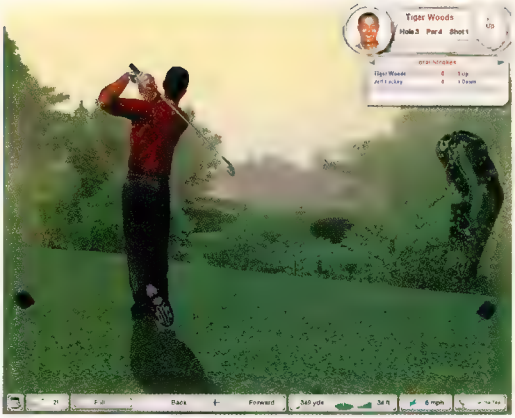
BY JEFF LACKEY

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER EA SPORTS
DEVELOPER HEADGATE STUDIOS
GENRE SPORTS SIM ESRB RATING EVERYONE PRICE $39.95
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 333, 64MB RAM (128MB FOR WINDOWS 2000/XP), 16MB 3D CARD, 820MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 700, 128MB RAM, 1GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB T&L SUPPORTED 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT INTERNET, LAN (2-4 PLAYERS)

Wow. That's a word you'll use a lot when playing *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003*. You'll say it when you crush a 3-wood and watch as a dynamic camera trails the ball through the sky, the green rushes up, and the ball comes in like an F-14 lining up a carrier landing, hits, and rolls up to the pin. Or as you start a round of golf at St. Andrews when the course is dark and gloomy, the rain pours down, and the wind howls—it's like playing golf in a gothic horror movie. As you watch and listen to the surf pound the shore at Pebble Beach and marvel at the red skies and the long shadows of a sunset. When you hit a 9-iron in a Skins game with Tiger and Duvall, and the camera automatically switches to a wide-screen view and zooms in on your ball bouncing into the hole to win the skin.

Previous versions of *Tiger Woods* have been high on ambition but subpar in execution. Forget those incarnations: *Tiger Woods 2003* combines the superb TrueSwing mouse-swing interface and good ball physics with jaw-dropping graphics and numerous features designed to make this a great sim. In addition to the expected game modes (Skins, Match Play, Stroke Play, Season, etc.), there's an intriguing Career mode that starts you out as a hacker with few skills and a thin wallet, and allows you to hustle a variety of events such as skills contests and head-to-head matches. You can then invest your winnings in better equipment, lessons, and improved golfing attributes. It's a great tutorial for newbies and a lot of fun for PC-golf veterans.



Think a golf game can't look snazzy? Think again, mister.

Speaking of vets: One of the few problems is that experienced PC golfers may find the game a tad easy at everything but the highest difficulty levels. The game's only other downside is multiplayer: Free IP-to-IP and LAN modes are available, but much of the online functionality requires a $4.95 per month subscription to EA Sports Online. While last year's version was a resource hog, *Tiger Woods 2003* ran well at high resolution on an 866MHz machine.

Graphics are particularly incredible, with beautiful lighting effects. The game presentation is like a television broadcast with an Emmy-winning director in the booth. If you think computer golf is predestined to be staid and ho-hum, take a look at *Tiger Woods 2003* and realize just how wrong you were. Wow.

VERDICT ★★★★½

With great features, outstanding physics, and incredible TV-style presentation, *Tiger Woods* leapfrogs over *Links*.

Law & Order: Dead on the Money

One *Law & Order* spin-off too many BY DANA JONGEWAARD

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER LEGACY INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER LEGACY INTERACTIVE
GENRE OVERLY EXPOSED TELEVISION SHOW POSING AS GAME ESRB RATING TEEN; MILD VIOLENCE
PRICE $29.99 REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 400, 64MB RAM, 700MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS NONE
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

Law & Order: Dead on the Money is structured like an episode of *Law & Order*. In the first half of the game, you play a faceless, voiceless detective who is partnered with Lennie Briscoe (voiced by Jerry Orbach); in the second half of the game, you play a faceless, voiceless district attorney who is partnered with Serena Southerlyn (voiced by Elisabeth Rohm). You click your way through interviews and crime scenes, choosing questions and searching for pertinent evidence to help convict the murderer. There are lots of annoying things about the game—if you don't ask the right questions in an interview, you can't go back and reinterview the subject, thereby screwing your chances of finding the right witnesses and getting the right evidence; your case file can fill up, so you're constantly having to make decisions about what evidence to keep and what to throw; the characters are freakishly animated, and watching a computerized Lennie will give you the heebie-jeebies. But the biggest problem with this game is that it is incredibly boring—you're basically watching an episode of the television show while contributing sporadic mouse clicks.

If you're someone who likes actually playing your games, stay away. If you're someone who's satisfied with watching jerky characters with absolutely frightening 3D modeling plod through a fairly boring, slightly illogical murder plot with little interaction on your part, then pony up, sucker, 'cause this is the game for you.

The victim, who at least won't suffer the indignity of having to live through this game.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆

***Dead on the Money* would be a lot more fun if it were *Dead on the Monkey*. That would be cool. And they could still use Jerry Orbach.**

RalliSport Challenge

Something lost in the translation BY WADE HERMES

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT GAMES
DEVELOPER: DIGITAL ILLUSIONS
GENRE: ARCADE RACING
ESRB RATING: EVERYONE
PRICE: $44.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 733, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 4, 256MB RAM, 128MB 3D CARD, FORCE FEEDBACK WHEEL
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: INTERNET (2-4 PLAYERS)

The few Rally racing games available on the PC have seesawed between being totally unrealistic or too true-to-life, leaving fans of this genre frustrated and unsatisfied. Microsoft has attempted to fill this void by porting *RalliSport Challenge* to the PC, but while the PC version is identical to its Xbox sibling in many ways, some of the spark didn't make the switch.

This style of racing takes some getting used to, but once you're comfortable with it, the physics model feels accurate enough to be believable. With a good quality steering wheel, the force feedback effects feel balanced and subtle. One annoyance is that you'll have to get accustomed to listening to your co-driver bark out directions and warn you of upcoming dangers. Be forewarned: He's not always accurate when describing the corners you're approaching.

Game progression follows the familiar formula of accumulating points through Career mode, with a limited number of races available until you qualify for better cars and more racing options. This is *RalliSport*'s Achilles heel. With no customizable single-race options, you're only allowed access to a handful of tracks in the Rally and Ice Racing divisions. This limitation quickly gets boring and makes it difficult to want to keep playing.

The glitchy A.I. causes co-racers to slow down too much at some corners and blow by you at impossible speeds in others. They also ram into your car enough to make you wonder if you're in a demolition derby. This makes you want to skip car-to-car racing altogether and just run the time trials that Rally racing is famous for. Claims to a realistic damage model apparently extend only to car cosmetics. Your car will look like a junk heap if you're not careful, but damage won't affect speed or handling in any way.

On the plus side, this is quite possibly the best-looking racing title I've ever seen. It's simply stunning, with trees that bend in the wind and ice textures so realistic, I could almost feel the chill winter air. The cars themselves are gorgeous, with a photorealistic appearance complete with actual Rally Sport paint schemes and decals.

This is quite possibly the best-looking racing title I've ever seen.

Still, nice graphics and a good physics model can't hide the inflexible playability of a game that could have been a real treat to play. *RalliSport* is for the hardcore Rally fan who really enjoys driving alone against time.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The challenge is not falling asleep at the wheel.

COMING SOON TO PC.

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

BLOOD
VIOLENCE

BLACK LABEL GAMES

VIVENDI UNIVERSAL INTERACTIVE PUBLISHING

"Enclave" Interactive game © 2002 Conspiracy Entertainment Corporation. All rights reserved. Enclave, Conspiracy Entertainment, and their respective logos are trademarks or registered trademarks of Conspiracy Entertainment Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries. Published and distributed by Black Label Games, Inc. All rights reserved. Vivendi Universal Games, the Vivendi Universal Games logo, Black Label Games, and the Black Label Games logo are trademarks of Vivendi Universal Games, Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries.

Battle Realms: Winter of the Wolf

This will do little to resurrect *Battle Realms* for any but the faithful BY THOMAS L. MCDONALD

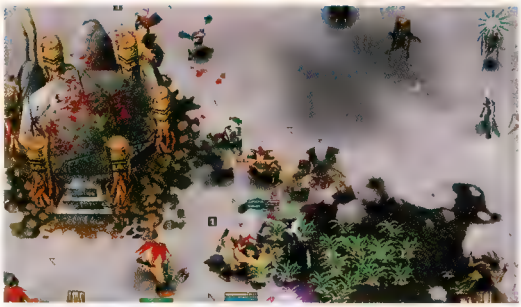
GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: UBI SOFT
DEVELOPER: LIQUID ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY
ESRB RATING: TEEN; BLOOD AND GORE, SUGGESTIVE THEMES, VIOLENCE
PRICE: $29.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 400, 64MB RAM, 600MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 600, 128MB RAM, INTERNET CONNECTION
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-8 PLAYERS)

Winter of the Wolf, an expensive add-on that ships with a full copy of the original *Battle Realms*, is Liquid Entertainment's effort to pump some fresh life into a once-upon-a-time visually slick RTS featuring small groups of units flailing at each other in a teeny window with little tactical finesse. Unfortunately, the intervening 12 months have not been kind to *Battle Realms*. It was a rather minimalist experience to begin with, and a year later—in the wake of *WarCraft III* and *Age of Mythology*—its graphics look chunky and gameplay's even more flaccid.

Liquid hasn't helped much by putting their absolute worst foot forward in the new campaign. The story follows Greyback of the Wolf clan as he makes his way out of the mines to lead a rebellion. While the protracted, indifferently-written dramatic exposition bogged down the original campaign, *Winter of the Wolf* is pummeled silly by it. The pace eventually picks up over the 11 long missions, but the introductory levels are like a slow death. Endless pedantic dialogue is punctuated only by simplistic, scripted puzzle tasks. By the time I got to my third shale pile, I was wishing for my own pickax to put through the screen.

The developers obviously relish sticking all these dramatic interludes and decidedly unstrategic elements into their strategy game, but the writing is



The new winter landscapes have interesting strategic effects, including frozen water sources, slowed rice growth, sudden winter storms, and more elements that influence gameplay.

childish ersatz-Robert E. Howard tripe, violating the first rule of dramatics: Don't say in 10 lines what you can convey in a couple of words. OK, they're slaves, they're rebelling, the other side is mean, I get it already!

You will, ultimately, get out of the mine and actually begin creating structures, building units, and waging wars, but little has changed here to make the game interesting. The viewing area is still too small, the battles are still cluster-frags, and the strategic elements are still rudimentary. Eight new units (two per faction, amounting to little more than upgrades) add minimally to the gameplay, and the new snow landscape is hard on the eyes. Worst of all is the low difficulty level: Anyone who finished the first campaign game will blow through this in seven or eight hours.

When I reviewed *Battle Realms*, I said that it was a dazzling presentation wrapped around an empty shell. A year later, the presentation isn't dazzling anymore, and the shell is even emptier.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Often dull and not particularly difficult, *Winter of the Wolf* adds little to *Battle Realms*.

Zoo Tycoon: Marine Mania

For your inner Shamu BY ELIZABETH MCADAMS

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT
DEVELOPER: BLUE FANG
GENRE: STRATEGY
ESRB RATING: EVERYONE
PRICE: $29.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 233, 64MB RAM (128MB RAM FOR WINDOWS XP), 600MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: NONE
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE

Zoo Tycoon: Marine Mania introduces more than 20 aquatic flora and fauna to your *Zoo Tycoon* zoo and adds another dimension to the attractions your zoo can offer. Dinosaurs are so 1994—the kids are hip to sharks, dolphins, sea otters, and penguins these days, and *Marine Mania* delivers seafood in spades. Most new species must be housed in aquatic tanks and require the care of a marine specialist (as opposed to the zoo keeper who looked after land animals in the original game).

Sea World-style animal shows and attractions are an added feature to this expansion. Certain animals can perform tricks, requiring you to build a show tank, purchase a grandstand, supply stage toys, and plan a schedule of performances to increase the zoo's profitability. Special tricks can only be unlocked after meeting prerequisites.

Like the original *Zoo Tycoon*, the difficulty level involved in the gameplay is practically nonexistent. Young kids will appreciate *Marine Mania* the most (although that certainly isn't always the case, and you know who you are). *Marine Mania* compensates for its lack of gameplay revitalization by including the second add-on (*Dinosaur Digs*) with the latest aqua-pack. That's right, two *Tycoon* expansions for the price of one! With the economy in the toilet, who doesn't love a good deal?

Exploit your new livestock and make money by forcing dolphins to perform in the new animal shows.

With the economy in the toilet, who doesn't love a good deal?

VERDICT ★★★★★

If you like *Zoo Tycoon* and you like fish and dinosaurs, you'll want this. Otherwise...

REVIEWS

Hegemonia: Legions of Iron

MOO on Slimfast BY DI LUO

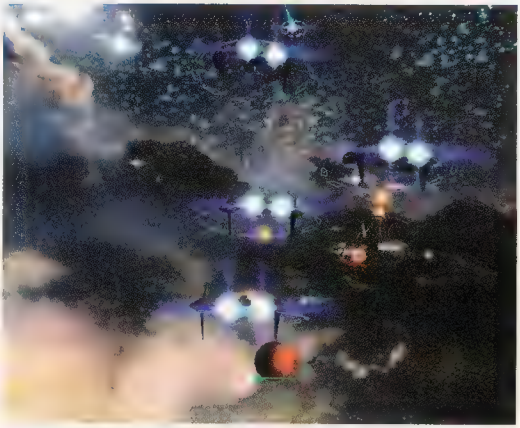
GAME STATS

PUBLISHER DREAMCATCHER
DEVELOPER DIGITAL REALITY
GENRE STRATEGY
ESRB RATING TEEN; VIOLENCE
PRICE $39.99
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 600, 128MB RAM, 450MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 16MB 3D CARD RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 1GHZ, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D CARD MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, INTERNET (2-8 PLAYERS)

Cut-scenes are generally good things—they add drama, focus the story, and look cool. Unfortunately, when a game is little more than a string of cut-scenes set to a rigid script, it becomes a movie instead of a game. Though Dreamcatcher's space RTS *Hegemonia* has promise, it falls into this trap, sacrificing gameplay and strategic choice for the "drama" of heavy scripting.

Developed by the creators of the *Imperium Galatica* series, *Hegemonia* tells the story of a civil war between mankind in 2104. Playing as either the Martian or Earth faction, you will quickly lead your side to victory and reunite the solar system. The rest of the game revolves around your attempts to increase humanity's hold in space and fight wars against aliens that resist the expansion.

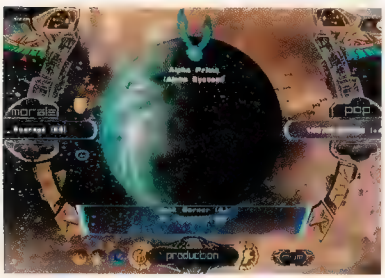
Hegemonia is similar to other space games with aspects of colonization, research, planet building, and fleet management, but most of these areas are given a "lite" treatment. There is a tight cap on the number of military and civilian units, and you will usually have a dozen squadrons at most. Research is the only area where you have any significant choice, though many of the techs are relatively useless.



These puny corvettes make no attempt at evasive action despite the firepower of the space station.

Combat is more akin to a duel of 18th-century battle lines than to futuristic ships traveling near the speed of light.

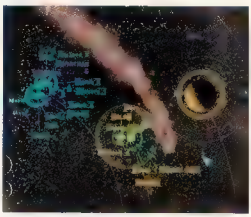
The missions in the single campaign are "story-driven," meaning that no matter your actions, you will get certain objectives popping up a few times per mission and they must be fulfilled before you move on. Rather than the open-ended gameplay found in most other space strategy games, each mission is self contained; most of your resources, like money and a majority of your ships, will not carry over to the next scenario. The missions are at times interesting, but often suffer from a lack of clearly defined objectives. Solving the missions doesn't involve much in tactical acumen either, since they are easily finished by following the pattern of building up your fleet before sending it from one crisis area to another.



The planet management interface is easy to use—probably because you don't have many choices.

Combat, when it occurs, is static. You don't have much control over your units except in setting their destination, target, and retreat from combat. When fleets engage, they will usually park themselves opposite the opponent at spitting distance and slug it out until one side becomes space dust. It is more akin to a duel of 18th-century battle lines than to futuristic ships traveling near the speed of light.

The size of *Hegemonia*'s maps exacerbates problems. The game areas are often huge solar systems and many scenarios will link several systems together. You'll have to spend most of your time waiting for your few ships to move from one vast emptiness to another. Even with accelerated time, this soon becomes tedious.



Most of the gameplay will take place in the tactical map.

Despite its faults, *Hegemonia* isn't a complete waste of time. The graphics are pleasant, voice acting tolerable, and the missions and story are just interesting enough to keep you interested. The multiplayer option also has promise, but it lacks good map selection and different game modes. For those seeking a light strategy game, *Hegemonia* is a decent choice, but anyone wanting deep gameplay should wait for *Master of Orion III*.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆
Not enough strategy, not enough game.

Astonia III

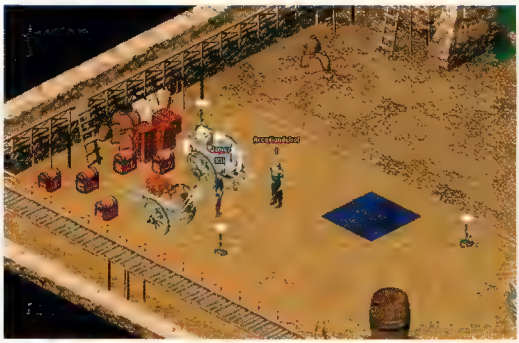
Pretty on the inside BY ARCADIAN DEL SOL

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: INTENT SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: INTENT SOFTWARE
GENRE: MMORPG
ESRB RATING: N/A
PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD; 28 DAYS FREE GAMEPLAY, THEN $9.95 A MONTH
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 300, 64MB RAM, 50MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 56K INTERNET CONNECTION RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS: NONE
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

Astonia III is a game that will fool you. It looks like *Ultima Online* before *UO* stumbled its way into 3D graphics. It plays like *Diablo* before it fell into a bottomless pit of cheating and redundancy. It is a game you download from the Internet—a resolutely old-school game you download from the Internet, which, as we all know, means it is going to be a disappointing waste of your time. That's what you'd think. But, like I said, *Astonia III* is a game that will fool you.

If you have ever tried *EverQuest* or *Dark Age of Camelot*, this will knock your socks right off: Every combat comes as part of a specific quest given to you by one of the many NPC townsfolk you encounter. Every quest given to you will not only offer you enough experience points to raise multiple skills several times, but by the time you complete each quest, if you haven't earned enough points to make your next level, you could probably kick a toadstool over for the final two points. You never have to return to the same hallway in the same dungeon to kill the same mutants over and over again until you're killing them in your sleep. You can, but *Astonia III* will not force you to go out and farm for character levels. Go ahead and put your socks back on.

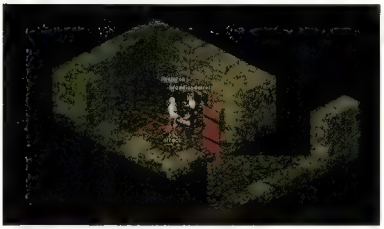


Astonia wastes no time. The very instant you log in, you have a quest.

You never have to return to the same hallway in the same dungeon to kill the same mutants over and over again until you're killing them in your sleep.

Astonia III is pretty solid, but it still leaves plenty of room for improvement should there ever be an *Astonia IV*. For example, the actual pace of the game is skill based. *Astonia III* starts you off at a snail's pace and if you don't like it, you can use your experience points to pick up the pace. Those who choose to make speed their primary skill can someday hope to achieve a brisk trot. This is a good thing because if you put that many points into your ability to get off your hands and knees and actually walk, you'll spend most of your time running for your life. If you forgo speed and raise your combat or magic skills, you'll find combat to be on the uncreative side. With little variety, you'll find yourself executing the same sequence of keystrokes anytime a monster appears within range.

Astonia III has a devout following, which can sometimes spell doom for dial-up players.



Sexiest combat graphics of the year? Not quite...

One question I have to ask: Why are player levels in Roman numerals? I'm not Roman. Sure, I can handle anything below 25 or 30, but once you start sprouting an L and a C, and your level is longer than your character's name, you lose me completely. Your level may as well be written down in binary.

Astonia III does not have the pretty colors and music of *EverQuest*. It does not have the unlimited options of *Ultima Online*. And maybe it's this weird hybrid of styles that makes it so refreshing to play.

VERDICT ★★★½

***Astonia III* shows that sometimes the old ways can be the best ways.**

REVIEWINDEX

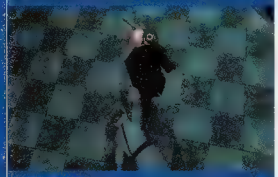
CGW capsules of recent reviews. Game names in red indicate an Editor's Choice game.

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Aliens vs. Predator 2: Primal Hunt	11/02	The add-on to last year's Action Game of the Year isn't worth the $20 pricetag	★★½☆☆
Age of Mythology	1/03	The last RTS you'll ever want	★★★★☆
America's Army: Operations	1/03	The U.S. Army makes a quality tactical shooter—and it's totally free.	★★★★½
Beam Breakers	2/03	A lame Fifth Element-style flying car game	★★☆☆☆
Celtic Kings: Rage of War	11/02	Fine blend of strategy, combat, and role-playing plus men in skirts	★★★★½
Civilization III: Play the World	2/03	Inexcusably buggy as shipped; unplayable without the patch	★☆☆☆☆
Combat Flight Simulator 3	2/03	Launched without adequate flight testing	★★★½☆
Dirt Track Racing 2	1/03	Better-than-budget-game racing at a budget-game price	★★★½☆
Divine Divinity	12/02	An old-fashioned RPG in both the best and the worst sense	★★★½☆
Earth & Beyond	2/03	EverQuest in space	★★★½☆
Earth 2150: Lost Souls	1/03	Earth 2150 redux all over again, only harder and undocumented	★★½☆☆
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	8/02	The definitive, open-ended RPG epic	★★★★½
Emperor: Rise of the Middle Kingdom	11/02	Impressions Software has just about perfected the historical city-builder	★★★½☆
EverQuest: Planes of Power	2/03	More fuel for the fires of die-hard EQ fans	★★★½☆
F1 2002	10/02	Delivers authentic yet accessible racing enjoyment for all	★★★★½
FIFA 2003	2/03	A good soccer game with World Cup-quality graphics	★★★½☆
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	1/03	Top-notch mission pack makes a good game into an outstanding one.	★★★★½
Grand Prix 4	12/02	An embarrassment of riches for F1 fans	★★★★½
Hearts of Iron	2/03	An enormously ambitious WWII strategy game with a lot of flaws	★★★½☆
Heroes of Might & Magic IV: The Gathering	2/03	More of the same—the same grinding disenchantment	★★½☆☆
Icewind Dale II	12/02	As good as any RPG released this year	★★★★½
Iron Storm	2/03	A boring, buggy Medal of Honor lite, with bad A.I.	★★☆☆☆
Links 2003	1/03	Everything you'd expect from Links, plus a new real-time mouse swing	★★★★☆
LOTR: The Fellowship of the Ring	1/03	Tom Bombadil and real estate transactions in place of gameplay	★★☆☆☆
Madden NFL 2003	11/02	Finally as good as the console versions, this is a football classic	★★★★★
Mafia	12/02	Big on flavor, but leaves you hungry at the end of the meal	★★★½☆
MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries	2/03	The best MechWarrior yet	★★★★½
Medal of Honor Allied Assault: Spearhead	2/03	Taut, well-scripted add-on that's just too short	★★★½☆
Medieval: Total War	12/02	The ultimate historical strategy game	★★★★★
NASCAR Thunder 2003	02/03	A solid racing game, but not the same caliber as Papyrus' NASCAR Racing 2002	★★★½☆
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	2/03	One of the best high-octane racing experiences around	★★★½☆
NHL 2003	2/03	The same old arcade hockey game, with updated rosters and downgraded A.I.	★★★☆☆
No One Lives Forever 2	1/03	As funny and stylish as the original and more fun to play, too	★★★★½
Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	10/02	Features and content worthy of a brand-new game, this is a benchmark expansion	★★★★½
Prisoner of War	1/03	More Hogan's Heroes than The Great Escape	★½☆☆☆
Project Nomads	2/03	Pretty floating islands crash on the shores of mediocre gameplay	★★★☆☆
RollerCoaster Tycoon 2	1/03	Not the sweeping success of the original, but still more ups than downs	★★★½☆
The Sims: Unleashed	12/02	Not just a great addition, an essential addition	★★★★★
Stronghold: Crusader	1/03	Nowhere near as good as the original	★★☆☆☆
Syberia	10/02	The best new adventure game in years	★★★★☆
The Thing	11/02	Great game concept bogged down by glitches and annoyances	★★★☆☆
Treasure Planet	2/03	Starfleet Command for kids, with rocket-powered sailing vessels	★★★★☆
Unreal Tournament 2003	1/03	Gorgeous and polished up, but lacking revitalized gameplay	★★★★☆
US Open 2002	11/02	Hard to find fault with this fine tennis sim	★★★★½
Virtua Tennis	2/03	A half-hearted port of a brilliant console game	★★☆☆☆
WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos	9/02	A very good game that could have used less game design and more excitement	★★★★☆
Worms Blast	2/03	Worms goes Bust a Move, and loses something in the process	★★½☆☆

CGW RECOMMENDS

Battlefield 1942 ★★★★★

Finally, a game that let us recreate battles from WWII without nitpicky "realism." Jump out of airplanes, land in tanks—whatever it takes to win. This is a computerized version of kids playing with toy soldiers. Since multiplayer matches handle up to 64 people, this is definitely a game for broadband, low-ping bastards.



Hitman 2 ★★★★½

Part of what makes us bitter and cynical is seeing developers make the same mistakes year after year. Which is why it was such a breathtaking surprise to see that IO Interactive had fixed almost everything wrong with *Hitman*. The result is a great blend of action and stealth, with suspenseful missions that can be won in more than one way. If you're looking for a sneaky shooter that'll keep your interest, draw a bead on *Hitman 2*.

Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin ★★★★★

Two years after *Combat Mission* turned wargaming on its head, the sequel marches to the Eastern Front with a ton of new units, scenarios, and campaigns. Grognards will enjoy the unrivaled detail and control options, while newbies will appreciate the improved graphics, outstanding multiplayer, and *260-page* manual that explains everything about everything.

Tech

The best ways to part with your hard-earned money Edited by William O'Neal

Keep

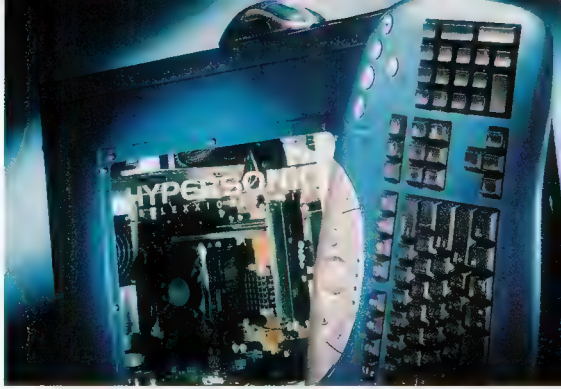
MANUFACTURER: HYPERSONIC PRICE: $3,807

Hypersonic's Sonic Boom enters the fray...finally

Eons ago, I had a conversation with Hypersonic PC's then-marketing director, who bluntly told me that Hypersonic didn't like to participate in hardware review roundups because, frankly, their machines never did well in them. "That's fair enough," I thought. But while it's their prerogative to not participate in roundups, choosing to opt out of them puts Hypersonic in an unfairly advantageous position relative to those companies who do participate. On its own, I would have no problem giving Hypersonic's Sonic Boom an Editors' Choice award: It offers a 3GHz Pentium 4 processor, ASUS' P4T533-C motherboard, 1GB of Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM, and Hercules' Radeon 9700-based graphics card. And all of that premium equipment helps the Sonic Boom to perform well enough. However, at $3,807 (not including speakers and a monitor), this machine is more expensive than every other competitor in this year's Ultimate Gaming Machine roundup. Plus, two other machines outperformed it!

By William O'Neal

Photography by Arnold Tiosejo



With a price tag of $3,807, the Sonic Boom *should* ship with a list of top-notch components. In addition to those listed above, this baby sports two 120GB Western Digital hard drives in a RAID configuration and Creative Labs' Audigy 2 soundcard, and the Reflexion paint job and display window make this machine a great rig for the LAN party crowd. However, Voodoo, Falcon, Alienware, and Vicious also make machines that not only look cool but are just as fast and less expensive. Of course, the Vicious, Voodoo, and Alienware machines were overclocked, while the Hypersonic was not. To that end, Falcon Northwest's Mach V Pentium 4 3.0 (the top non-overclocked machine in the UGM roundup) is the best rig with which to compare the Sonic Boom, and performance numbers bear that out. The performance delta between these machines is so small that, as Dave Salvatore would say, "The difference is probably in the noise."

But there is something to remember: While the Falcon machine had to come in under my $4,000 price limit (including speakers and a 21" monitor) Hypersonic was able to build the machine they wanted to build without the restrictions of money that the other companies had.

When it comes to stability, the Sonic Boom has it in spades. I noticed none of the artifacts in *IL-2 Sturmovik* that I saw with the Vicious and Voodoo machines that I tested for the UGM roundup. The only inconsistency that occurred was in *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast*, where I had to run it in Windows 98 Compatibility mode. However, I've encountered so many problems with *Jedi Knight II* on a number of machines that I'm inclined to think that this has less to do with the machine than it does with the Radeon 9700 Pro videocard, Windows XP, the game itself, or some combination of all three. I also put this machine through my *IL-2 Sturmovik* "stress test": running a looped demo of the game at 1600x1200x32 with 4x FSAA turned on over the weekend. As expected, the machine fired right up and everything else seemed to be working just fine.

All in all, the Sonic Boom is a great machine: It performed well and ships with a nice list of components. However, at nearly $4,000 (not including speakers and a monitor) it's an understatement to say that I expected a little more from this rig in the performance arena.

By the Numbers

MANUFACTURER	Hypersonic	Falcon Northwest
Manufacturer	Hypersonic	Falcon Northwest
Model	Sonic Boom	Mach V Pentium 4 3.0
Price	$3,807	$3,995
Score	4.00	4.00
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition
Processor (CPU)	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB
Motherboard	Asus P4T533-C	Intel D850EMV2 (Intel i850e)
Memory	1GB Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM	512MB PC-1066 RDRAM
Hard drive	Dual 120GB Western Digital 7200RPM hard drives in a RAID configuration	Dual 40GB IBM DeskStar 120GXP 7200RPM hard drives in a RAID configuration
Graphics processor	ATI Radeon 9700 Pro (128MB)	ATI Radeon 9700 Pro (128MB)
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer
DVD-ROM drive	Toshiba 16x DVD-ROM drive	Toshiba 16x DVD-ROM drive
CD-RW drive	Plextor 48/24/48 CD-RW drive	None
Monitor	None	22" Viewsonic E220
Speakers	None	Klipsch ProMedia 4.1
Keyboard	Logitech Elite keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Optical USB	Microsoft Intellimouse Optical mouse
BENCHMARKS		
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	15760	15777
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	11226	10342
3D GameGauge 3.0* (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	73	77
3D GameGauge 3.0 (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	56	57
Comanche 4 (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	59	60
Serious Sam: TSE (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	90	90
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	139	138
Dungeon Siege (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	88	86
IL-2 Sturmovik (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	70	80
Unreal Tournament 2003 (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	59	65

*3D GAMEGAUGE 3.0 AVERAGES THE FRAMERATES OF COMANCHE 4, DUNGEON SIEGE, IL-2 STURMOVIK, JEDI KNIGHT II, NASCAR 2002, NHL 2002, SERIOUS SAM: TSE, AND UT2003

VERDICT ★★★★½

A good machine, but at nearly $4,000, we expected more for our money.

The performance delta between the Sonic Boom and Falcon's Mach V is so small that, as Dave Salvatore would say, "The difference is probably in the noise."

Radeon 9700 PRO
9700 PRO
MADE WITH NO
Radeon 9700 PRO
ATI
ATI.COM

Something for Everyone

Logitech's Z-680 5.1 speakers may be the new king of the crowded 5.1 speaker hill BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER LOGITECH

PRICE $399

Logitech's Z-680 5.1 speaker system has everything that a multi-platform gamer would desire: versatility, connectivity, and excellent sound quality. Similar to the Z-560 speakers in design, the Z-680s come with a break-out decoder that has Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II, DTS, and THX certification. In layman's terms, the decoder is the best way to go if you desire true surround-sound enjoyment.

The multi-input control center is easy to use and comes with a remote control for tweaking adjustments. The five satellites rate at a hefty 53 watts each, while the sub-woofer has a whopping 185W of power. Acid jazz, trance, and drum and bass tracks demonstrated a loud and deep bass response, rivaling the excellent ProMedia subwoofer from Klipsch. Explosions in games like *Battlefield 1942* and *Unreal Tournament 2003* exuded hefty rumbles, which rattled my windows and woke my family. In a combat scene from the DTS version of *Predator*, the Z-680s offered an incredible imaging and sound-stage presence. Sonic detail surpasses any PC speaker I've had the pleasure of listening to. In addition, high and mid-range tones are silky smooth. In Glinka's Russian and Ludmilla Overture, tonal characteristics of symphony horns come across as crystal clear and vibrant.

Whether you own a PC, Xbox, PS2, or GameCube, or just need another set of home theater speakers, the Z-680s are the only 5.1s to own.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Logitech just set the benchmark for the 5.1 speaker arena.

Thanks for the R&D, Apple!

Creative takes a look at Apple's iPod and—thankfully—bites its design BY WILLIAM O'NEAL

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER CREATIVE LABS

PRICE $299 (WITH $50 REBATE)

The latest iteration of Creative Labs' Nomad Jukebox line, the Nomad Zen, is a smaller version of the CD player-size 20GB that can hold more than 8,000 WMAs ripped at 80kbps or 5,000 MP3s ripped at 128kbps. Similar to last year's offering, the Nomad Zen offers connectivity via FireWire or USB 1.1, versatility the Apple iPod (the device whose design the Zen rips off) lacks—the iPod only supports FireWire. Gadget freaks familiar with older Jukeboxes will recognize the interface on the Zen's 1.7-by-0.8-inch (132x64 pixel) backlit LCD and welcome the up-to-12 hours of playback that the built-in rechargeable Li-ion battery affords.

The body is constructed of anodized aluminum, and while it's slightly larger than the iPod, it still fits in your pocket. The Zen also ships with a travel pouch that clips to your belt. Creative added a variety of touches that makes the Zen stand out from other large capacity MP3 players: The included USB cable doubles as a battery charger; you can transfer titles between the player and your PC; and you can even create, organize, and edit play-lists from your PC! The only downsides to the Zen are that it lacks the additional audio outputs that previous Nomads have had, and FM tuning and audio recording capabilities are only available with after-market wired remotes.

After all is said and done though, anyone who purchases the Nomad Zen will be pleased. With transfer speeds of up to 0.77MB per second with USB 1.1 or 3.35MB per second via FireWire, it shouldn't take long to fill up the 20GB hard drive. Throw in decent headphones (the wrap-around ones that ship with it suck), and you're good to go.

VERDICT ★★★★★

This may be the last MP3 player you'll buy—until the next one comes out.

A Solid Cordless Joystick

IT DOESN'T HOOK OVER A LOT OF DESK? BY DARREN GLADSTONE

TECH STATS

LOGITECH

$70

Cynics, like yours truly, think wireless joysticks are just a gimmick. After all, how much space are you really putting between you and your PC when you play? Last time I checked, just about any good flight game has a cockpit's-worth of controls that can't be mapped to this joystick's 10 buttons. In other words, you're still landlocked. The biggest selling point for this wireless controller (which uses three AA batteries) is that it's easy to hide from the few people who don't already know how much of a dork you really are.

The hard molded plastic grip nicely fit both large and small mitts in the office.

Despite my ranting, though, Logitech's Freedom 2.4 not only worked, but worked well. The good responsiveness is hardly surprising considering that it transmits feverish button presses at 2.4GHz. The hard molded plastic grip nicely fit both large and small mitts in the office, and the buttons were spaced reasonably well.

With roughly the same $70 price tag though, I'd stick with a good force feedback controller like Microsoft's Sidewinder Force Feedback 2, but hey, whatever floats your boat. If there's enough EMR wafting through your house thanks to wireless keyboards, mice, phones, and God-knows-what-else, this cordless joystick will be a welcome addition. Just warn your pacemaker-packing granny before she comes over to visit.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

If you're looking to cram up that stack of wires around your rig, then invest in Logitech's Freedom 2.4 Cordless Joystick.

WIL POWER

By William O'Neal

Confessions of a So-Called Technical Editor

I've been using [illegible] at work for years, but in terms [illegible] ...

Loyd's Cracked Case

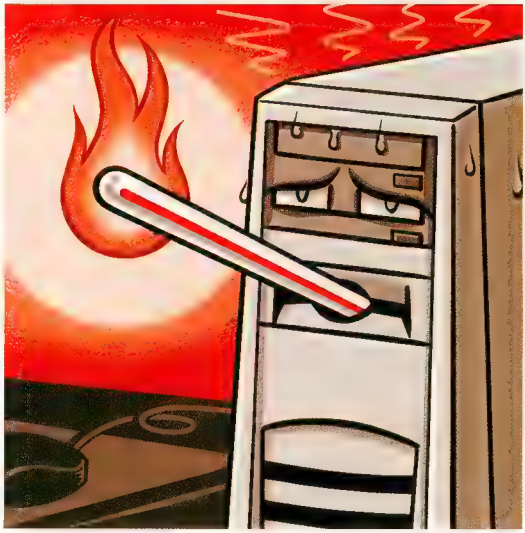
The Instability Trap

It's getting hot in here **By Loyd Case**

So you boot up *Age of Mythology* and settle in for a terrific Friday night gaming session. Everything's going great. You're in the zone, building like a madman, finding the resources, advancing in record time toward the Mythic Age. Then, suddenly, you find yourself staring at the Windows desktop. You mutter something under your breath about buggy games and monopolistic OS makers, shut down, and go watch *Firefly* instead.

What's going on here? While it's certainly true that games can be buggy, these types of stability issues aren't always due to the games themselves. They're often the result of some instability that exists in your system.

There are many reasons for system stability problems. While it's easy to point fingers at buggy games or buggy drivers, heat and power are actually the two most common contributors to intermittent and unpredictable stability problems. It's worth investigating these issues, especially if you're having problems in multiple games. Let's look at each in turn.



Power: The latest 3.06GHz Pentium 4 processor nominally draws 81 watts. Even the 2.53GHz variant can pull more than 60W in normal use. Similarly, the Athlon XP is capable of pulling in excess of 70W. Toss in the latest high-end ATI or Nvidia graphics card, a 7200RPM hard drive, a boatload of memory, and a CD burner, and you now have a system that demands more current than many power supplies can deliver. This is particularly true of generic power supplies. A supply rated at 300W can often deliver 300W on one of the power rails. The problem is that most systems draw power on 3.3 volt, 5V, and even 12V rails. Suddenly that 300W supply can barely deliver 180.

Unless you're one of those people who lives with his case open all the time, heat buildup inside the PC can create real problems.

The solution is not to get a huge power supply, but to get one rated to deliver solid current at peak loads. Examples include PC Power & Cooling, Enermax, and Antec power supplies. I've successfully used PC Power & Cooling and Antec supplies with great results.

Heat: This one can sneak up on you. Unless you're one of those people who lives with his case open all the time, heat buildup inside the PC can create real problems. However, it's not simply a matter of checking the BIOS to see if the CPU is running hot. BIOS thermal readings are notoriously inaccurate. And a high CPU temperature—meaning anything north of about 55 degrees Celsius—isn't always the direct problem.

Heat builds up inside the system, sometimes very gradually. Even if your CPU fan is cranking at 7000RPM and sounds like an F-16 engine spinning up, that may not be enough. The heat being pushed out by the CPU fan has to go somewhere. If that hot air gets exhausted over your memory, then the memory can start to get flaky.

Or maybe your fan is inadequate. I've been running tests using the Athlon XP 2700+. It's a great CPU, but it runs pretty warm. Because of the relatively small die size, the heat density coming off the tiny die is pretty damned dense. The Cooler Master heat pipe cooler that had been doing an admirable job with Athlon XP 2200+ CPUs proved too anemic for the 2700+. So if you've recently upgraded your CPU, check to make sure the heat sink is rated to work well with the CPU. If not, you'll need a new CPU cooler.

So what can you do? In the end, if your system has been suffering mysterious crashes, it might be the power supply, or overheating. If you're running a no-name, generic power supply, it may be time to pick up a beefier one. Similarly, if you've upgraded your CPU recently, you may be due for a new CPU cooler. The result may surprise and please you.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHNNY MOJO

Tech Medics

You have questions, we have witticisms **By William O'Neal**

What is this 3D GameGauge 3.0?

Where could I get a copy of 3D GameGauge 3.0? I already have 3DMark 2001 SE.

Jackie

3D GameGauge 3.0 isn't a single application; it's composed of framerate tests in *Comanche 4, Dungeon Siege, IL-2 Sturmovik, Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast, NASCAR 2002, NHL 2002, Serious Sam: TSE,* and *Unreal Tournament 2003*. We run each game at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off and again with 4x FSAA turned off. We repeat these steps at 1600x1200x32 with FSAA turned off and with 4x FSAA turned on. We then take the average framerates of the eight games and calculate an unweighted geometric mean of these nine data points. The Excel formula is "=geomean (number 1, number 2, etc...)" The geometric mean is the nth-root of the product of the data points (where n is the number of data points in the geometric mean—in our case eight). For games that don't have built-in framerate tests, we use Fraps (www.fraps.com) to get the average framerate. You can go to ExtremeTech.com for more details.

God bless Id

I have a Pentium 4 1.3GHz with 384MB of PC800 RDRAM and a GeForce4 Ti 4400. I got my hands on the "leaked" *Doom III* demo and gave it a try. When I look at walls in the game it runs at 60fps. However, when I'm walking around it drops down to about 20, and when I'm firing at monsters it bottoms out at about 5. I'm worried that I won't be able to play new games like *Doom III*.

Miguel

Things seem fine when you're looking at a wall because in situations like that, your graphics card doesn't have to do much. However, once you start walking around (or shooting), there's more for your graphics card to render, and that's why things slow down. I imagine that you will be able to play games like *Doom III* when they come out. You also need to remember that Id is known for pushing technology—bless them. So don't think that all games are going to tax your system like that.

E-tailing

I'm going to build my dream machine rather than ordering a custom-built one from a place like Alienware or Voodoo. What are some good sources (websites, companies, retail stores, etc.) for components?

Sean

One of the difficult things about building your own machine is that you often have to get different parts from different places. Not only does this add to the overall cost, but you'll often have to deal with back-ordered parts at one retailer while another gets the parts to you quickly. I'd suggest going to a place like Pricegrabber.com to find the products. Pricegrabber.com is one of those shopping portals that aggregate products from a number of e-tailers. Once you're there, read the myriad customer reviews to find an e-tailer with a good record.

To overclock or not to overclock

In January you wrote an article on overclocking. How can I use overclocking to enhance the performance of my PC?

Mark

I'm on the fence when it comes to overclocking. If you have relatively decent hardware, then it's not really worth it. However, if you're not rocking the most up-to-date peripherals, then it may help things tremendously. A good place for information regarding your specific components is Overclockers Hardware (ochardware.com).

Like I said, "To overclock or not to overclock"

I just looked at the January 2003 article on the Ultimate Game Machine. In my reading I saw the sidebar on overclocking. What is overclocking, and how can you make sure you're not doing it?

John

Graphics chips and CPUs are designed to run at a specific clock speed. However, it's possible to make both of them run at higher clock speeds to squeeze out more performance. While overclocking makes things run faster, it puts more stress on your CPU or graphics card.

Most machines ship with their components at factory settings, so chances are your rig isn't overclocked. However, to make sure, check in your display properties to see at what speed your graphics processor is running and make sure that it's using default settings. Also, right-click on the My Computer icon on your desktop and choose Properties to verify that your CPU is running at the clock speed (GHz) that is the factory default.

"I'm worried that I won't be able to play new games like *Doom III*."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MITCHGREENBLATT.COM

Killer Rigs

The best recipe for building the ultimate gaming system **By William O'Neal**

This month's Killer Rigs are identical to last month's. The Power Rig still sports a 3GHz Intel Pentium 4 processor, Intel's D850EMVR motherboard, 512MB of Samsung PC-1066 RDRAM memory, and a Radeon 9700 Pro. The Lean Machine is rocking an AMD Athlon XP 2200+ processor, an Asus A7N8X (Deluxe) nForce2 motherboard, 512MB of Crucial PC-2700 DDR memory, and a Radeon 9700 Pro. The performance numbers prove that both of these machines are capable of handling any game out there, and the beauty of the Lean Machine is how upgradeable it is: All you need to do is throw an Athlon XP 2800+ into this baby and watch the benchmark numbers skyrocket.

Taking the Killer Rigs online

The big news this month is that *CGW*'s Killer Rigs section is now featured online at cgw.gamers.com/killerrigs! Being online not only makes it easier for us to have more up-to-date prices (something that you all have been clamoring for), but it will also be easier to share ideas about the components that I use, why I'm using them, and what you think I should change using Gamers.com's message boards. So if you don't agree with the selections I've been making, now's your chance to stop on by and give me a piece of your mind.

Now's your chance to stop by and give me a piece of your mind.

POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	$300
Processor (CPU)	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB	$500
Motherboard	Intel D850EMVR	$170
Case	Antec Plus660B	$100
Memory	512MB Samsung PC-1066 RDRAM	$250
Hard drive	120GB IBM DeskStar 7200RPM	$175
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro	$300
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2	$125
DVD-ROM/ CD-RW drive	Plextor PlexCombo DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive	$150
Monitor	22" NEC MultiSync FE1250+	$600
Speakers	Cambridge SoundWorks MegaWorks 510D	$300
Keyboard	Microsoft Multimedia keyboard	$35
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0	$55
TOTAL		$3,060

LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	$300
Processor (CPU)	1.8GHz AMD Athlon XP 2200+	$140
Motherboard	Asus A7N8X Deluxe (nForce 2)	$130
Case	Antec Plus660B	$100
Memory	512MB Crucial PC-2700 DDR-RAM	$140
Hard drive	40GB IBM DeskStar 7200RPM	$80
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro	$300
Soundcard	Onboard nForce 2 Audio	N/A
DVD-ROM/ CD-RW drive	Plextor PlexCombo DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive	$150
Monitor	17" Samsung SyncMaster 768MB	$200
Speakers	Creative Labs Inspire 2.1 (2500)	$50
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet keyboard	$25
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Optical	$45
TOTAL		$1,660

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO

Gamer's Edge

Winning for Gamers

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

We turned this month to Di, the resident office champion in *Age of Mythology*, who routinely beats the combined forces of Jeff, Ken, and Scooter. Here's his advice for how to remain dominant.

Raid early and raid often. Since everything requires gold, you should deny that resource to your opponent. Build some fast units to disrupt his outlying gold mines, but make sure to maintain a powerful main force in reserve. If your enemy sends out his troops to meet your raiders, attack his town. Throw all of your offensive god powers into this attack, destroy his houses so he can't build new units, and cause irreparable harm to his economy.

–Di Luo

WIN

If you have a dirty trick for recent games like *Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin* or *America's Army* and want to win the collector's edition of *Age of Mythology*, then send an e-mail with your trick to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com with the subject line "Dirty Trick." Happy gaming!

Age of Mythology

Egypt and Norway battle for supremacy

PAGE 122

AGE OF MY

Two men, one game.

Bruce and Tom play *Age of Mythology* on a randomly chosen map, flipping a coin to see who chooses his god first. The winner of the match will have to wash the loser's car.

0:00, BRUCE

I lose the coin toss and choose Ra because I'm a builder weenie. The Egyptians get a powerful economic head start with their initial access to farms and their empowering pharaohs. Ra's priests can also empower, though not as effectively as the pharaoh. Empowering magically adds about 20 percent to whatever a laborer brings to the empowered drop-off point. It also speeds construction time. Ra is best off keeping his priests at home and enjoying their unique empowering ability. My plan is to hurry to the Heroic Age and build Ra's more powerful chariot archers to control the map. Migdol strongholds can crank out these chariots with Egypt's otherwise superfluous wood. I'll complement these with war elephants to knock down buildings.

0:00, TOM

Ooh, Bruce picked the Egyptians again. Big surprise. He always does this. Bruce has been a god power whore ever since he pulled off an amazing Set combo: Set's vision to trace a line of sight to my main town center, Ptah's shifting sands to teleport my army there, and then Horus' tornado right on top of them, messing up my beautiful Greek city. This sort of stuff is why no one likes Bruce. Now that we're playing for real, I'm moving on to a new dirty trick which he hasn't seen yet: Thor's gold rush. Unlike the other Norse gods whose dwarves are only effective at mining gold, Thor's dwarves can harvest everything. But whereas gatherers are created with the same food you need to "age up," dwarves are created with gold, freeing up valuable food. Also, by immediately laying a dwarven mine, Thor's initial god power, right next to my town center, I'll quickly harvest its 500 gold for making more dwarves to gather food. Thor can jump to the Classical Age in virtually no time at all. If I can quickly scout all the gold mines on the map, I can probably box Bruce in and limit his gold income, which will quickly shut down an Egyptian player.

1:42, TOM

The map is Mediterranean, a ring of land around a central lake. This means there's not much room to maneuver and there's no place for Bruce to hide. It also means easy fishing, which I'll use as a food source after I've eaten

FISHING WITH TOM The Norse enjoy farm-free food production.

my chickens and hunted out the immediate area. I'm looking forward to a farm-free game.

3:42, BRUCE

Egyptians don't need wood for their buildings, so I'm focused mainly on gold and food. I'll still get some laborers to chop wood early on so when I get my migdol stronghold built I'll have a nice stockpile for my chariot archers.

4:42, TOM

Tom has advanced to the Classical Age by the justice of Forseti—in less than five minutes! I probably would have done it even faster if I hadn't forgotten to build a house before sending my ulfsark off to scout. Suddenly I had reached my population limit and my dwarf production locked up. Ack. Where's my ulfsark? A small hitch. Now a word about Norse minor gods. Thor tends to his wounded men with his classical god; Forseti's god power lets him drop a healing spring on the map or Freyja's Valkyrie myth units will heal friendly armies. I chose Forseti because in order to curry divine favor, the Norse must fight, but fighting risks casualties, which waste resources. My solution is to ignore favor. I make a point not to count on any Norse units or improvements that cost favor. I play as an atheist, a secular Norse tribe that can't be

THOLOGY

ANARCHIC AGE SHOWERS The rain in Egypt stays mainly on the farms.

bothered to fight for the gods. Once favor rolls in later, it'll be like found money.

4:50, BRUCE
That was quick. As the Egyptians, I've almost always aged up before Tom. He either has a new plan or is cheating.

6:12, TOM
Herbjorn Squidsucker the Hersir recovered the blanket of Empress Zoe, which makes my buildings more resistant to siege weapons. Yay.

6:19, BRUCE
Tom found a relic, and the game was nice enough to send me a message about it. Now I remember the drawbacks to not scouting the map. You can use Page Up and Page Down keys to scroll the messages and check for relic messages, or you can click on an enemy unit or building, then click on the little 'i' in the portrait at the bottom of the screen to open a detailed help screen that lists improvements.

7:21, TOM
I just found the Sistrum of Bast, which makes villagers cheaper. Yep, gatherers now cost less food. The gatherers I'm not using because I'm making dwarves this game. Dwarves who still cost 60 gold even after Squidsucker safely ensconced the useless Sistrum of Bast in my temple. What the hell is a Sistrum anyway? Whatever it is, at least Bruce doesn't get it.

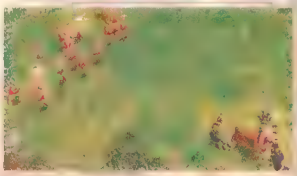
7:34, BRUCE
Tom briefly shut down my second gold mine with a pair of hersirs. In some early raids like this, don't forget that you can attack with your laborers, gatherers, or villagers. Just select them and give them an attack order. You'd be surprised how well they can hold off smaller numbers of attackers, especially if you've paid for Ra's Skin of the Rhino, which substantially improves laborers' fighting capabilities. In this case, however, my three laborers would have been slaughtered, so I withdrew them. Keeping an empowering priest next to your barracks is a good idea for situations just like this. I quickly shifted the priest to my barracks, reducing the time it took to train a group of eight slingers. Then they and the priest chased the Norse away from my mining camp. I can't afford to build an army yet, which is why I trained slingers, who cost wood instead of precious food. I hope this attack was just a raid.

"I play as an atheist, a secular Norse tribe that can't be bothered to fight for the gods."

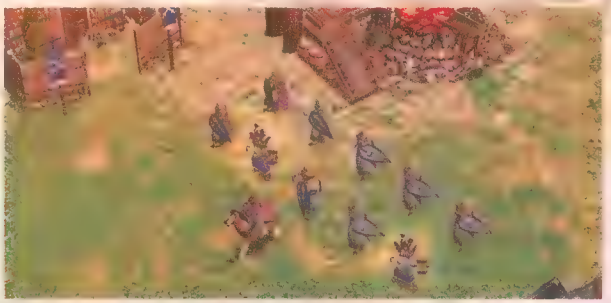
9:47, TOM
I hit the Heroic Age in about nine minutes, partly because I had long ago built Thor's dwarven armory. The dwarven armory is cheap and immediately available, allowing for an early edge by improving armor and attack value of units. This helped me hold off a small drive Bruce made for a gold mine. It also offers an extra level of improvements: hammers of the gods, meteoric iron mail, and dragonscale shields. For my heroic god, there's no point in choosing Skadi, whose frost god power actually protects enemy units with its ice while they're frozen. So I choose Bragi. He gives me the fearsome flaming weapons god power.

13:53, BRUCE
I finally hit the third age, but I'm running short of gold. My first mine is gone and I'm relying on another mine near my starting location. Tom seems to have a few hersirs on either side of me, and I'm using a handful of slingers to pretend like I have an army. Sekhmet as the next god choice was a no-brainer, since his slings of the sun and bone bow improvements directly help my slingers and chariot archers. Sekhmet's citadel god power is great when one of your town centers comes under attack: Suddenly a town center with 2800 hit points gets a +3 attack and an additional 800 hit points. When coupled with masons and architects, the improvement is even more pronounced. However, Hathor was a tempting choice for a couple of reasons. First, it's usually good to distribute the cost of your military units. The gold cost for Hathor's petsuchos would have been a nice counterpart to the food cost for Bast's sphinxes. Second, the roc, a flying transport, is one of *Age of Mythology*'s most underrated units. It can quickly carry 15 units across the map, regardless of terrain. On this Mediterranean map, where Tom seems to have me hemmed in on two sides, I could have loaded up a roc and sent it across the water to the middle of the map to ambush him. Now that I'm in the third age, I can start to build new town settlements. I haven't scouted much, but just to my east, there's a settlement near a gold mine that I can grab. So once slings of the sun is complete, I'll take my slingers, some priests, a sphinx, and four laborers to make a dash for the settlement and its gold mine. This is crucial, because controlling the map is often a matter of grabbing the most settlements. By hitting the F4 key, I can see from the score that Tom already has three settlements.

15:21, TOM
I was guarding the unoccupied gold mines on Bruce's side of the map when he rode in with a full-blown army. At least I took out his sphinx. But I've been focusing on armory improve-



AND IT STONED ME Bruce's slingers versus Tom's hersirs.



SO, WHAT ARE YOU GONNA WEAR? Norsemen sport fancy equipment they got from the dwarven armory.

BARBARIANS AT THE GATE The Norse making their final assault.

"I've got flaming weapons ready and my healing spring has everyone in top form."

ments, new town centers, and ox caravans, so I can't keep him back as well as I had hoped. I was saving up food and gold to go up to the Mythic Age, but I might abandon those plans for now and try to keep him from getting his third settlement. If I can limit him to two settlements and box him in to prevent a profitable caravan trade, I can maintain my advantage.

16:53, BRUCE

I am the king of all: a new town center with a nearby gold supply, a big spread of farms, and a lot of extra wood. The last is thanks to something named Bast's Adze of Wepwawet. Migdol stronghold, here I come. Since Tom seems to have a lot of hersirs, I'm going to throw some axemen into my army for their quadruple damage bonus against Norse heroes.

21:19, TOM

I've got an army of hersirs, ulfsarks, and huskarls. I was able to afford a single battle boar, which should break up his little slinger party nicely. Most of my armory advances are up to iron. I've got flaming weapons ready and my healing spring is keeping everyone in top form. I've reached the only unclaimed settlement and now I'm building a town center on it.

22:11, BRUCE

My chariots are fast, so I keep them in their own control group to use their speed. As Tom's units were building a town center on the last settlement, the chariots stumbled onto him. Since I had a few myth units bringing up the rear and knew he still had a flaming weapons god power up his sleeve, I used Bast's Eclipse to strengthen my sphinxes and lock out his flaming weapons. I lost the battle but killed most of his units. Now it's a race to get reinforcements to that settlement before he claims it.

22:55, TOM

Ouch. I lost everything but two ulfsarks and a huskarl, who quickly returned to the business of finishing the town center, where I can make more ulfsarks. This is probably where the game will be decided, so I'll then build a couple longhouses for immediate reinforcements and replacements. I've already paid for a levy for my longhouse soldier levy, so it shouldn't take too long to make a new army. I also got a hefty dose of favor from that battle. Hmm, what to spend it on? More battle boars!

24:00, BRUCE

Unfortunately, Tom's built a fourth town center, while I only have two. I do have a trick up my sleeve, though, since I just paid for the Mythic Age and chose Horus. I should have avengers soon, as well as the axe of vengeance improvement to help my hersir-killing axemen raze buildings. Most important, I'm going to try to slip a chariot into Tom's main base to level it with Horus' tornado god power, which is my favorite.

24:10, TOM

As so often happens with the Egyptian economy, Bruce jumps up to the fourth age while I'm busy building an army. My guess is he's chasing tornadoes. I told you he was a god power whore. Hopefully, he won't use his little whirligig on my gathered army. There's no way I'm going up an age anytime soon, so I'm spending everything on my army, which is maxed out with armory improvements. I've got a hill fort under construction by this contested town center and a train of ox caravans to my marketplace in a far corner of the map.

26:11, BRUCE

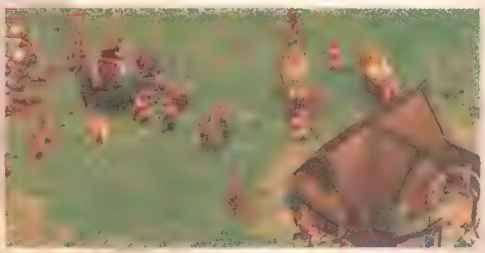
Tor-NA-do! I'll bet Tom doesn't think he's in Kansas anymore! I hit the town center with an army, timing the attack to cover a lone chariot heading toward where I think his main base is. I used the tornado on his temple, armory, longhouse, and a few houses. No farms, though. And somehow Tom brought in reinforcements and wiped out my army. I sense cheating.

28:11, TOM

I think it's over. Bruce squandered his tornado as if I were still playing the Greeks, whose buildings are usually clustered around their villagers. But because the Norse build buildings with military units, their crucial buildings are spread out. We are nomads after all! We come from the land of the ice and snow, with the midnight sun where the hot springs blow! And because I was gathering food from fishing, there were no farms for him to destroy. The result was that his tornado didn't hit anything crucial. He did kill some pigs that I'd never gotten around to slaughtering. Bruce Geryk, Slayer of Pigs. In the meantime, I drove an attack back by staying under cover of my town center. I pressed my advantage, took a gold mine he was using that I hadn't seen before, and now my army is attacking his main town center with a pair of portable rams helping out.

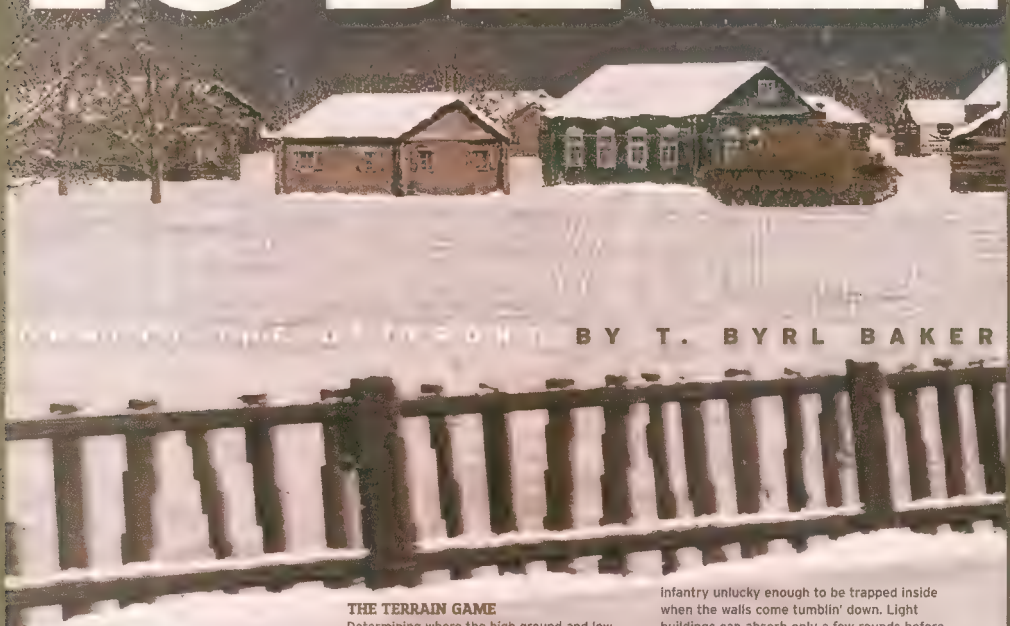
28:25, BRUCE

I hope Tom is reading my chat messages, because they're very clever and are probably hurting him more than my forces can at this point. If I had more gold, I could spit out mercenaries to defend my town centers, but I've been struggling for gold most of this game. I used my citadel god power, but it didn't seem to make much of a difference. I did learn that a citadel is built with damage proportional to that of the town center it's built on. That's the final bit of wisdom I can offer before I leave to wash Tom's car.



LOGS AND HOGS Tom's portable rams and battle boars in the penultimate battle.

COMBAT MISSION: BARBAROSSA TO BERLIN



BY T. BYRL BAKER

The Russians and Germans fought some of the most brutal battles of WWII, a fact that the developers of *Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin* obviously took to heart. If you thought the first game in the series was tough, you haven't dealt with the new unit orders, crazy equipment match-ups, and multitude of other changes found in the sequel. The tips in this guide should make your transfer to the Eastern Front much easier.

THE TERRAIN GAME

Determining where the high ground and low spots are on the map is critical when planning an attack, and grid overlay terrain helps immensely. It works just like the name suggests, placing a faint grid on the ground that makes elevation changes much easier to see. You need replacement textures for each type of grass and snow in the game (including steppe terrain), and the best place to get these files is the *CM* mod database (cm.cozog.com).

BRING DOWN THE HOUSE

One thing that hasn't changed much from the original version of the game is the ease with which high-explosive ammo (HE) blasts structures into dust, basically eliminating any infantry unlucky enough to be trapped inside when the walls come tumblin' down. Light buildings can absorb only a few rounds before caving in, while two or more tanks pounding away at a heavy building can usually finish it off in three or four turns. Buildings often start out with a little damage already, so be on the lookout for structures with one or two asterisks beside their names that also have infantry hiding inside. This works both ways of course—be careful when placing your troops in one of these dilapidated structures.

When shooting HE into a large building like a factory, it is possible to destroy it from the inside out. Use infantry to clear out any anti-tank troops and suppress the other soldiers, then run a tank or three right up to the edge of the building so the turret is sticking

QUICK TIP **TREAD LIGHTLY** Many missions take place in heavy snow or other bad weather conditions, and having vehicles and tanks bog down is always an issue. When possible, stay away from scattered trees, soft ground, and wheat fields, regardless of the weather.

Bogged vehicles can usually become unstuck, and as this Tiger is demonstrating, they still are combat-effective.

Each of these tanks has a Fast move order, represented by the light green lines. Infantry units embarked on the tanks have Run orders, represented by the blue lines. The infantry won't hop off and start running until the tanks reach the end of their movement line and come to a halt.

These heavy machine gunners were on the move when they were asked to deploy and put down some area fire. It will take at least 38 seconds before the bullets start flying.

through the wall. Blast away at the inner portion until you bring the roof down on the defenders' heads, then repeat the process on the outer sections (assuming there are troops left in there).

CRACKING THE KV-1

Those used to having complete tank superiority playing as the Germans against the Allies in *Combat Mission: Beyond Overlord* should prepare for a shock when playing against the Russians in early *CMBB* battles. From 1941 until the middle of 1942, the Soviet KV series of tanks is absolutely superior to all German armor, able to shrug off dozens of direct hits from most Panzer IIIs. We tested it against early antitank guns with calibers of up to 100mm; even from the sides and rear, high-velocity shells had trouble breaking through the KV's thick skin. The only thing working in the Germans' favor is that the tanks are relatively rare, so you rarely face more than one.

If you do come up against one of these behemoths early on, there are a few methods you can use to disable or dispatch it. We tested all sorts of equipment against it and discovered that AT infantry armed with panzerwurfmines are particularly effective. The only problem is getting them close enough to toss their lawn darts of death, as the KV-1 has a forward-firing coaxial machine gun as well as a rear-firing MG. Try to wait until the tank is buttoned and approach it from the sides.

If you don't have any tank killer teams, pound on the KV's hull with all your tanks and AT guns from the closest range possible, preferably from an angle. Even concentrated firepower from several tanks and AT guns likely won't be enough to knock out the beast, but there's always a chance you'll cause the crew to panic and bail, damage the gun, or immobilize it and make flanking easier. Don't rely on aircraft to take the KV out as there's no guarantee they'll target it, let alone actually hit it during their firing pass.

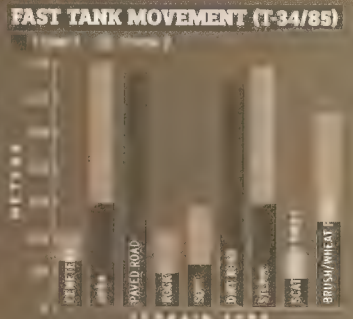
Finally, sharpshooters make excellent, cheap antitank units. A lucky hit can take out the commander, and a near-miss generally causes the targeted tank to button up. Once buttoned, the crew has a much tougher time spotting threats approaching from the sides or rear of

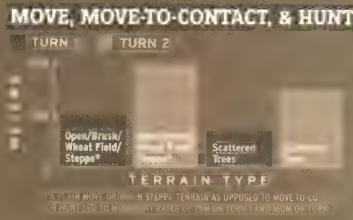
KEEP 'EM ROLLING

For the first test, we issued a Fast move order to several stationary T-34/85 tanks, each in a different type of terrain. Command delays varied very slightly among all tanks, and this chart will give you a general idea of how far across the map a tank can travel in one or two turns.

For the second test we selected a few common terrain types and issued Move, Move-to-Contact, and Hunt orders for several tanks. In general, the tanks moved at the same speed regardless of the order, so using Hunt or Move-to-Contact is recommended over the plain Move order.

Note that tanks have no trouble crossing stone walls or hedges, and also can move across cemeteries, albeit slowly. Also, since Fast movement in scattered trees results in approximately the same speed as Hunt, Move, or Move-to-Contact orders, we recommend never issuing a Fast move order when traversing that type of terrain.





the tank, and you can move in for the kill.

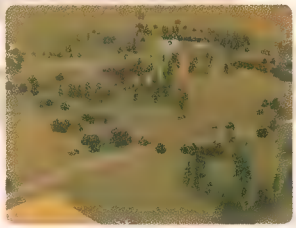
These tactics also work for the Russians when the tank superiority tables are turned later in the war and tough German equipment like Tigers begins to dominate.

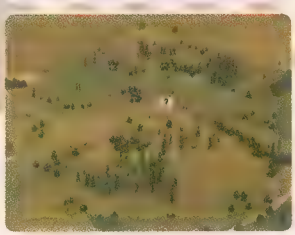
DELAYED GRATIFICATION

The pause command is essential if you want to conduct a coordinated attack. Always delay your platoon leaders and other HQ units by at least 10 seconds when issuing movement orders to keep them behind the infantry squads and out of danger. Pausing also is useful for shoot-and-scoot tank tactics. Have two tanks shoot-and-scoot (preferably from different angles), but delay one of the tanks by 30 seconds or so. Assuming they go after the same target, the second tank will pop out to shoot just as the first tank is retreating from sight, and the target's turret likely will have rotated to attack the first tank, making it very vulnerable.

DEATH FROM ABOVE

Don't get so caught up in the ground war that you forget about your buddies in the sky.

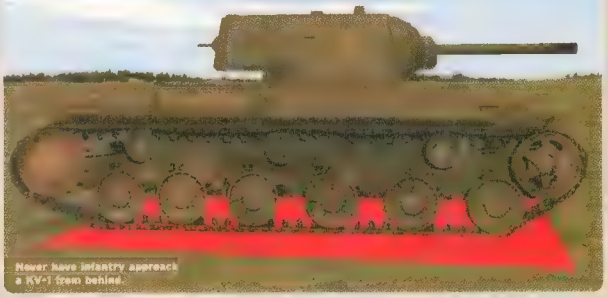




Grid terrain makes it much easier to see major and minor elevation gradations, helping planning immensely.

QUICK TIP

DOWN THE HATCH When sizing up enemy tanks, you want to hit with infantry assault guns keep in mind that the front armor is usually the strongest. Also, the rear engine compartments and turret rings are the weakest. The KV-1, for example, has a rear-firing machine gun that can ruin the day of any unit attempting to sneak up from behind. Try to get the tank to button up before making the assault.



Never have infantry approach a KV-1 from behind.

Aircraft can turn the tide of a battle, and *CMBB* offers a varied and powerful selection. Unfortunately, you can't select an ingress or egress path for support planes, and their approach angle can make all the difference. Planes also pick their own targets and make attack runs whenever the mood strikes them, so don't just purchase them in hopes of keeping them in reserve to take out a major threat—that's an unreliable plan.

Aircraft tend to focus on tanks and vehicles instead of infantry, and their presence is always preceded by the sound of an engine droning overhead one or two turns before they

MOVE OUT

[redacted]

INFANTRY MOVEMENT

	Open/Rock	Tall Pines/ Scattered Trees	Slope	Woods/ Brush	Wheat	Scattered Buildings	Heavy Buildings
TURN 1							
Fast	[redacted]	[redacted]	40	100	110	150	100
Medium	110	90	80	55	70	70	50
Slow	60	50	45	30	40	30	30
Human Wave	100	75	75	50	65	90	40
Other Special	80	60	60	40	50	55	30
TURN 2							
Fast	320	260	232	170	200	250	200
Medium	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Slow	125	100	90	65	80	90	70

actually attack. Use this to your advantage by listening for enemy planes and dismounting vulnerable infantry from tanks that are on the potential target list.

If you are playing against a human opponent, don't forget to invest in some antiaircraft platforms to give your team a little insurance. In our experience 37mm and quad-20mm equipment works best. Note that single-shot AA guns like the flak 88 will not fire at planes.

AA usually doesn't shoot down incoming targets, but it doesn't take a lot of equipment to spoil attack runs. If the threat goes away or never materializes at all, AA guns have quick turrets and tons of HE ammo that make them excellent for chewing up infantry or taking out vehicles. With the exception of expensive German Ostwind and Wirbelwind tanks, all AA equipment is extremely vulnerable to nearly every type of incoming fire, so be careful.

COUNTDOWN TO DESTRUCTION

CMBB implements what Battlefront calls a "death clock." This feature makes it impossible to know whether or not the tank you just hit is knocked out or simply annoyed. The end result is that units set to hunt or specifically target another unit sometimes continue firing into a dead shell for a minute or longer, wasting ammo and possibly setting themselves up for a counterattack. Turn on detailed reports by pressing Shift-D and pay close attention to any text that pops up. Also listen for sounds like hatches opening and the metallic creak that is made when a tank is killed. With a little practice, it is possible to make an educated guess as to when a tank is really knocked out or abandoned so you can shift fire to a different target or get out of the area.

WAVE OF MUTILATION

Human Wave gives the Russians a new movement option, but it is definitely a last resort. If you want your troops to force an attack, use Advance or Assault instead. Those two commands give the soldiers a temporary morale boost and let them lay down some suppressive fire as they rush the enemy position. Troops ordered to perform a Human Wave march forward like zombies for a few yards and then break into a dead run, doing little but screaming their heads off. It may be enough to push back a weakened enemy, but if you're up against a fresh unit with good morale, those Human Wavers will be dead.

Splitting a squad seriously reduces its firepower, so use the command sparingly.

QUICK TIP

KEEP IT SIMPLE Pathfinding still stinks in this game, especially for tanks in dense urban settings, but be very careful when issuing multiple orders to micromanage the movement of your troops. Each extra order you add to the chain also adds several seconds of delay time before they begin carrying it out. Issue only one to three commands at a time for best results.

This infantry unit was issued multiple commands to get it to stick to cover while on the run, but more than one minute has been added to its order delay time as a result.

TAKE AIM

Artillery, mortars, howitzers, and other off-map indirect-fire weapons all have an inherent delay time that mainly is based on the part of the chain of command to which the assets are attached. Battalion-level assets have the smallest calibers and the lowest delay times, while Army-level assets have enormous calibers and equally enormous delays.

[redacted] comes to using tactical artillery in this game. Many [redacted] artillery, and ground-hugging bazooka-armed [redacted] the other. Dropped artillery never approaches the [redacted]

The basic [redacted] using standard quality German and Russian [redacted] to keep in mind that the spotter's delay is longer, or shorter, if the spotter is one or more experience [redacted] artillery delay times to one minute, regardless of the spotter's experience or the artillery's caliber.

ARTILLERY DELAY TIME

Asset Level	Russian Delay Time (minutes)	German Delay Time (minutes)	Russian Equipment Types in This Class	German Equipment Types in This Class
Army	25	15	152mm, 210mm, and 305mm artillery;	240mm artillery
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Battalion	1	1	Light artillery	Light artillery

AMERICA'S ARMY

EXCLUSIVE PRIMA CONTENT

Welcome to Sniper School

According to the U.S. Army, the mission of its Sniper School is to "Train joint forces to engage point targets with long-range sniper fire and be proficient in critical field craft skills; provide joint forces with doctrine and subject matter expertise in sniper employment."

In real-life, the school is five weeks long and extremely challenging. You learn to use two weapon systems: the M24 sniper weapon system (a modified Remington 700 firing 7.62mm rounds) and the M82A1 semi-automatic anti-materiel rifle (which fires all versions of .50 caliber ammunition), used to destroy equipment and light vehicles at long ranges.

Sniping requires the mastery of many different skills besides marksmanship. To graduate, you have to successfully pass a variety of tasks, including unknown distance shooting for time (up to 800m), firing at moving targets during the day (400m-700m) and night (300m-600m), stalking over various types of terrain against two sniper instructor observers (requiring two shots at the same target undetected), range estimation (10 targets using naked eye, Army-issued binoculars, and sniper scope), target detection (finding 7 out of 10 concealed military items in 40 minutes), .50 caliber sniper rifle familiarization, stress fire (shooting for accuracy under duress), urban hide sites, countersniper missions, urban live fire, and a field training exercise—a culmination of the skills learned in the previous four weeks.

M24 range

Fortunately, the process for graduating from Sniper School in *America's Army* is a little less rigorous. If you qualify as an Expert with the M16, you're automatically eligible to

The M24 Sniper Weapons System is known as one of the best sniper rifles in the world.

To pass the M24 portion of Sniper School, you must hit a target that's up to 800 meters away in one attempt.

attend Sniper School. You have already learned the capabilities, employment, and use of snipers in combat. Now it is time for you to become familiar and qualify with one of the basic tools of the sniper, the M24 sniper weapon system.

M24 SWS

WEAPON STATS

TASK: Familiarize yourself and qualify with the M24 sniper weapon system.

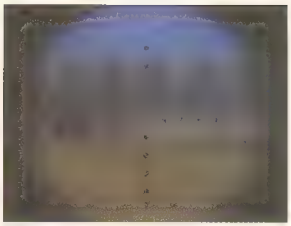
CONDITIONS: In unlimited visibility, detect and engage targets at extreme distances (300m-800m). You have 20 rounds to familiarize yourself with the weapon, but only one shot for qualification.

STANDARD: Given one 7.62mm round, detect and engage one man-size silhouette at an extreme distance.

Qualifying on the M24

Deploy the bipod supports while lying prone. This increases your accuracy.

This exercise is easier than qualifying as an Expert with the M16. The M24 is a bolt action rifle that holds five rounds in an interior magazine. You can reload five rounds at once if it is empty or reload enough to fill up the magazine. Each round is loaded individually, so reloading can take some time. The key to sniping is lying prone and using the bipod support by pressing H. Right-click or press Z to bring up the scope view. The M24 has a 10x scope that allows you observe and aim at



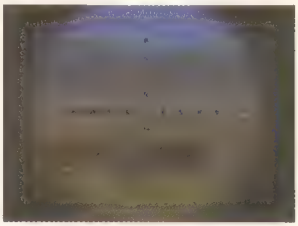
Without the use of the scope with the M24, sniping becomes an exercise in luck.

distant targets. When the scope view is open, concentrate on your breathing, just as you did when using the iron sights of the M16.

Let the crosshairs rock up and down, positioning them over your target at either the top or bottom of the motion. A spotter lets you know if you hit the target.

You have 20 rounds for practice. Use them all to get a feel for the way the scope works. Take your time. A successful sniper is patient. When you breathe, the crosshairs usually go straight up and down. On occasion, they may go to one side. The best tactic is to line up the crosshairs so at the top or bottom of the movement, the crosshairs are right on target. Wait until the sight moves into position and then fire.

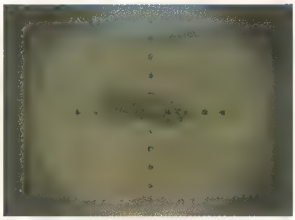
Work the bolt to recharge a round so you are ready to fire. Reloading takes more time



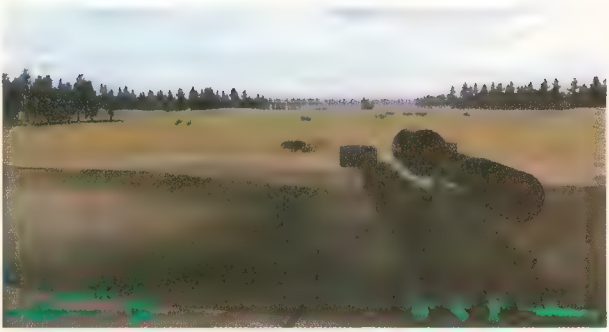
Line up the crosshairs of the scope at the top or bottom of the movement.

Since rounds are loaded individually, it takes a while to reload the five-round capacity chamber.

See that target way in the distance? Yeah, neither can we.



It's important for you to refocus on the target between your shots.



The M82A1 weighs approximately 16 pounds—not the most portable weapon in the world.

BARRETT M82A1

WEAPON STATS

because each round is loaded individually.

The M24 is not a rapid-fire weapon. After every shot, you must work the bolt action to recharge a round. You can maintain your scope view, but it moves off target a bit. Try shooting at each of the targets on the range. Once you have expended all of your practice rounds, you are ready for the test.

For the qualification and graduation to the next level, you only have one shot. You must hit a single white target out on the range with your first shot. Take your time—there is no rush. Start off by lying prone and then pull out the bipod supports. Locate the white target through the scope and get into the breathing rhythm. When you are at a pause in your breathing and the crosshairs are centered, pull the trigger. If you hit, you have passed. If you miss, you have to try again.

CAUTION: When you are assigned as a sniper during a mission, you receive a large penalty to your accuracy when you fire the rifle without using the scope.

M82A1 range

Congratulations, soldier! You qualified with the M24 sniper weapon system; now you are ready to qualify on some heavy, long-range firepower. Next up is qualification on the M82A1 semiautomatic anti-materiel rifle.

TASK: Familiarize yourself and qualify with the M82A1M semi-automatic anti-materiel rifle.

CONDITIONS: In unlimited visibility, detect and engage targets at extreme distances (300m to 800m). You have up to 10 rounds in order to familiarize yourself with the weapon, but only one shot for qualification.

STANDARD: Given one .50 caliber round, detect, engage, and destroy one piece of unexploded ordnance at an extreme distance.

Qualifying on the M82A1

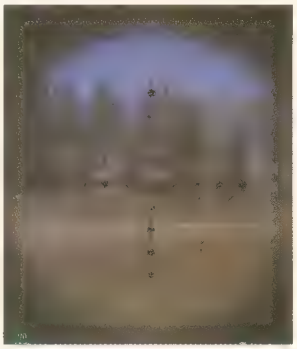
Get ready for some powerful recoil when you fire this weapon. The M82A1 is a very large weapon. It fires a .50 caliber round and its magazine holds 10 rounds. It is used for targeting not only enemy soldiers, but also vehicles and other material targets. Its rounds can penetrate an engine block. Vehicles are valid targets for the M82A1. Try shooting at a couple of them sometime.

The qualification process is very similar to that for the M24. You have a magazine for practice, but only 10 rounds, so make them count. Try targeting the vehicles as well as the orange targets. Even though the M82A1 is a semiautomatic rifle, it has such a powerful recoil that it is impossible to keep the scope centered on a target after a shot. You must reacquire the target after each shot. However, with a .50 caliber round, if you hit, you don't need to reacquire.

Shoot at the other targets as well. You may find the M82A1 a bit easier to use than the M24. As before, lie prone and deploy the bipod for supported fire. Bring up the scope view and wait through the rocking for the correct time to fire. Once you have expended all 10 rounds in the magazine, it is time for your test.

To qualify on this powerful sniper weapon and pass the test, you have one .50 caliber round and must destroy an unexploded mortar round with a single shot.

Get into the prone supported position and locate the mortar round through the scope. Line up the crosshairs so they are over the middle of the round, and wait for the pause in your breathing cycle when the sights are centered. Pull the trigger and qualify with a hit. If you miss, you can practice some more and then try the test again.



Aim at these orange targets with practice shots.

LINKS 2003

PART 1 OF 2

BY ROB SMOLKA

One of the most exciting things about the latest games in the *Links* series is that gamers now have a way to create their own courses. You now have the tools on hand to make whatever your fertile imagination can think of a reality. Or you would if you could make heads or tails of the confounded program! If you're like most, the idea of just opening the course design program, much less trying to create something worthwhile, is a scary prospect only undertaken by the bravest souls.

Which is where this handy beginner's guide comes in. Armed with the knowledge we will impart to you, the only thing you'll have to fear is fear itself (and a nasty case of carpal tunnel syndrome, but that's not covered in this article). So boot up the program, set these pages in front of you, and take the first steps toward creating your dream course (or at least something playable).

CHECKING THE CHECKLIST

The first thing you'll notice upon starting up the program is the checklist. This is a helpful tool to make sure you haven't left out any steps as you create your courses. For now, click on OK, and the checklist will disappear—we'll go with the default settings for our new courses. To call it up again, just go to the Help menu along the top of the screen.

Now comes the fun part. It's time for you to draw your first hole. To do this, you need to be in Plan mode. If you see four tabs marked Plan, Terrain, Planting, and Display, clicking on one of these will quickly take you to different sections of the program. Make sure that the Define Hole Path icon is selected (the fifth from the left, right below the Plan tab).

For the opening hole, and create a simple par 4 with three tee boxes (for men, women, and professionals), which you need to select in the menus on the left side of the

screen. The Advanced Settings button also lets you adjust whether you want the hole outlines to be drawn, and lets you add a simple set of bunkers when the hole is created. These are on by default, but can be switched off later when you get more comfortable and want to define your own hole bound and create bunkers from scratch. M

HAVE A CLUE

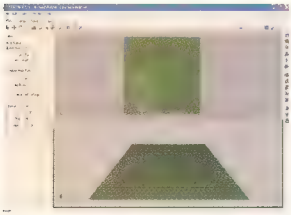
Although it's extremely early in the design process, now is a good time to start thinking about the style of course you want to make and give some

desert, etc.) and some of the distinctive features that the cou (heavily bunkered), lo

or wide fairways, heavily sloped greens, etc.). As for the layout, figure out what kind of mix you want among the par types (as a rule, a standard course has two or three par threes and fives, with the rest being par fours), and how you want to space them out. Doing this right away will make the process of laying out the holes much easier, and there's less of a chance that you'll have to go back and change things around later.

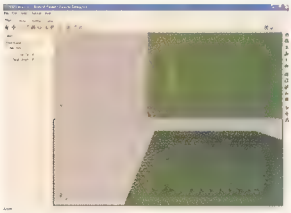
AS EASY AS CLICK, CLICK, CLICK

Once you decide where the first tee-off box will be, click the left mouse button. You'll see the spot has been locked down, and when you move the mouse, the distance from the original spot to the new one will be listed. Move the mouse pointer about 250 yards from the original spot and left-click again. Do this once more, and you'll see the program will complete the hole, drawing the outline of the hole, as well as the outline for the fairway. If you were making a par three, only two clicks would be necessary, and a par five would necessitate one more click. The example shows a fairly long (432 yard) hole with a dog-leg to the left. Follow this same process to create the rest of your 18-hole masterpiece.

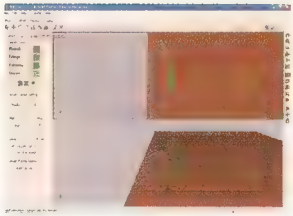


LOCK IT IN

Concentrate on the first hole for now. The next thing you need to do is to mesh the hole with the terrain. To do this, click on the Insert Shape icon, which is the fourth from the left (it



looks like a kidney bean with an arrow attached to it). Go back to the hole you created and click on the red outline of the hole. The view should zoom in, and a dialog box should appear, asking if you would like to automatically add a tee and pin position to your hole. Say yes (A freebie! You can always adjust them later), and your hole should appear in the lower portion of the screen as part of the triangular grid. Congratulations—you're the proud parent of your first hole!

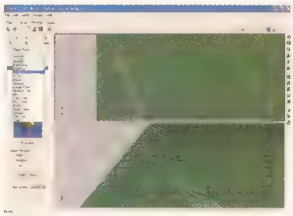


TIDYING UP THE TERRAIN

Start making the hole look like something you can really be proud of. Click on the Terrain tab and you'll see a new set of icons available below. Choose the fourth from the left (the spray can). This lets you actually draw terrain changes right on the hole. The settings on the left of the screen can be changed to make the height larger or smaller and to spread the change over a larger or smaller area. For now, leave the terrain the way it is and start adding some objects.

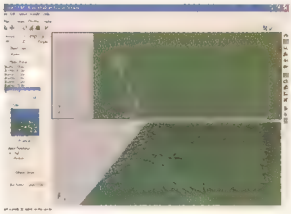
HELPFUL HINTS FOR VIEWING YOUR COURSE

It's a lot harder to work on a hole when you're looking at it from far away. To get a close-up view, use the scroll wheel of your mouse while in any view. Uh-oh... now the area you wanted to work on is out of sight! Click and hold the mouse wheel button and move the mouse to center whatever part of the hole you would like in the view screen. If you don't have a scroll wheel on your mouse, go buy a new mouse (or just use the buttons along the right-hand side of the screen).



ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, OR MINERAL

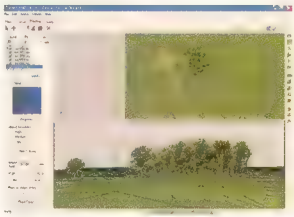
Whenever you want to add an object to the course, you have to "plant" it. Select the Planting tab and decide whether you want to place 2D, 3D, or other objects by using the tab



buttons. Trees and other similar objects will be under the 2D section. To select from the many different types of objects that come with the program, access the pull-down menu. As you can see, there are plenty of choices for customizing your course (134 items listed under bushes alone). Choose the object you wish to plant, and select the Plant icon, which is the third from the right (a tree leaning to one side). Now, go to the top view of your hole and plant a few objects. You'll see them as little dots (depending on how far away the camera view is). Other views will show you your handiwork much more clearly (especially the game-camera view). You can adjust the height of the objects by using the menu on the left side of the screen. You can also set it so that the objects you plant fall into a certain range of heights, in order to avoid giving them a cookie-cutter look.

VIEW ASKEW

To change views quickly, move the mouse to the upper left corner of the current view and right-click. This will open up a menu, letting you choose from a number of different views and perspectives.



THE FOREST FOR THE TREES

The Plant Objects tool is very powerful, but sometimes you want to plant a huge number of trees to create a forest. There's a much better method than individually placing every tree—and that's the foresting tool! First, you need to go back to the Plan tab. Select the Create Shape icon (sixth from the left—the kidney bean with no arrow), and draw few areas that you would like to turn into forests. Select one of the forest areas you just drew, and double-click on the area. This will select that shape for foresting. Go back to the Planting tab and select the second icon from the right. Choose the type of tree you would like to plant. Now, go to the control panel on the left and scroll to the bottom (you can also left-click and drag the control panel upward). Doing this will reveal the Plant Forest button. Set the density level for the tress you are going to place, hit the button, and voilà, instant forest! You can add more and different trees as much as you'd like using this tool, as well.

This is just the beginning of what you can accomplish with this amazing program, but it should get you off to a good start. Next month, we'll look at some of the finer points and cover some of the trouble spots you might run into as you expand your abilities.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

Amazon.com **Amazon.com Top Sellers** 42, 43
ATI Technologies, Inc. **Radeon 9700** 115
Cdv Software Entertainment **American Conquest** 35
Codemasters, Inc. **IGI - 2** 78-79
Codemasters, Inc. **Operation Flashpoint** 68-69
Creative Labs **Audigy/6.1** C6
Dell Computer Corp. **Dimension & Inspiron Systems** 30-31
Dreamcatcher Interactive **Harbinger** 87
Earthlink **Earthlink (demo)** ..... demo
Eidos Interactive, Inc. **Praetorians** 4-5
Electronic Arts **1503 A.D.** 18-19
Electronic Arts **Battlefield 1942** 48-49
Electronic Arts **C&C Generals** C2-4, 1
Electronic Arts **Ultima Online** 66-67
Full Sail Real World **Full Sail Real World Education** 37
Infogrames, Inc. **Matrix** 11
Infogrames, Inc. **Shadow of Undrentide** 36
Infogrames, Inc. **Unreal II - The Awakening** 44-45
Infogrames, Inc. **Unreal Tournament 2003** 75
Internet Games Distribution **Savage** 63
Magnell Associates, Inc. **ABS Ultimate Game Machine** C5
Microsoft **Freelancer** 28-29
Microsoft **Impossible Creatures** 76-77
Microsoft **Rise of Nations** 6-7
Microsoft **Xbox Live** 46-47
NovaLogic, Inc. **Delta Force Black Hawk** 65
Pricegrabber.com **PriceGrabber.com** 17
Sony Online Entertainment **The Planetside** 20-21
T-Hq **Red Faction II** 54-57
Take 2 Interactive Software **Midnight Club 2** 15
Take 2 Interactive Software **Vietcong** 73
Ubi Soft Entertainment **IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles** 13
Ubi Soft Entertainment **Rainbow Six** 22-23
Ubi Soft Entertainment **Splinter Cell** 41
University of Advancing Computer Tech **Rock the Tech World** 99
VUG - PPG **Enclave** 103
VUG - PPG **Enclave** 105
VUG - PPG **Enclave** 107
VUG - Sierra Ent. **NASCAR Racing 2003 Season** 53
VUG - Universal Interactive **Jurassic Park** 2-3

LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS. XBN'S DEFINITIVE REVIEW
XBN
XBOX NATION INDEPENDENT
RETROGAMING
INDIANA JONES
BRUTE FORCE
Interplanetary warfare, cooperative gameplay, and a big, ugly lizard-man. XBN's exclusive hands-on with Digital Anvil's sci-fi Xbox epic.
Looking for an independent voice in all things Xbox related?
THE GAMING LANDSCAPE ON THE XBOX IS FOREVER CHANGING AND WITHOUT THE LATEST INFO ON THIS UP-AND-COMING PLATFORM, YOU'LL BE LEFT IN THE DUST.
ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA

Scorched Earth

Can I Get a Lei?

Or at least a hug? **By Robert Coffey**

To all the people who end their e-mails to *CGW* with "And if you could send me a Radeon 9700 or a spare hot gaming rig I'd really appreciate it!! :)", please stop. Now. You'll get those things only after I do, and if the soulless robotic professional nay-saying footdraggers residing in the Ziff Davis Foundation for Systematic Denial and Bean Counting continue to have their way, that's not happening soon. While you'd assume that as Serious Computer Gaming Professionals we'd have the planet's best computers, nothing could be further from the truth. The harsh reality is that our PCs push all their pixels via a monumentally intrusive setup involving surgical staples, yards of rubber piping, and the unrelenting consumption of carnitas burritos. Oh, we've ordered the new PCs, and they're coming, they really are, we're assured, just as soon as Godot Shipping can box 'em up.

You see, as a game journalist—the living, breathing Oxford Dictionary definition of "oxymoron"—you get used to getting no respect. From your parents, from your spouse, from the hogtied drifters languishing in your basement, from yourself, in fact—how else could you spend lunchtimes mechanically ingesting 14 grease-dripping swine torpedoes? We can deal with that, it's one of the hazards of the job, just like *Farscape: The Game*.

Still, you'd figure the rest of the team would be on your side, that the people making a living off your willingness to endure *Kingdom Under Fire* would support you. Alas, no one loves a game journalist, not even their corporate overlords.

So, while there's apparently ample money around for executives to file outrageous expense reports full of fancy dinners and week-long retreats to exotic locales, we can't even get some frickin' machines to do our jobs properly. I guess some animals are more equal than others, and here on Ziff Davis Farm the animals not wearing pork-stained *C&C: Renegade* t-shirts are the ones racking up the frequent-flier miles.

I'm not saying the execs haven't earned their perks. But I burned an entire weekend playing *Trespasser* to meet a deadline. I finished *Daikatana*—finished it! I bet John Romero didn't even finish *Daikatana*, I bet he took one look at those robot frogs and thought, "I must have been drunk the last four years," and uninstalled that aberration like any sensible person. I slogged through *Mystery of the Nautilus, Survivor: The Interactive Game,* and *Majestic*. Do I deserve some love, too? Like, say, a trip to Hawaii? Ladies and gentlemen, I deserve a Purple frickin' Heart.

The jaundiced hairless sausage of Scooter's body stuffed in a Speedo...

I want to assure you this rant isn't fueled by some thwarted desire to see the jaundiced hairless sausage of Scooter's body stuffed in a Speedo and lounging on a white sand beach (that's what www.scooterthong.com is for). No, the hot tears streaming down my face as I force the corpse of yet another drifter into my pickle barrel full of lye are but the simple tears of the wounded heart, the lachrymose fruit of one who longs with a childlike simplicity to bask in the warm benediction of his coworkers' mutual esteem. As we endure yet another slight, I assure you that every socially maladroit pariah on the *CGW* edit staff is crying on the inside—well, except for Jeff. He's in a fetal position on the men's room floor sobbing hysterically and frantically stuffing his mouth with toilet tissue.

But no one's going to listen to me. I need your help. Jeff Green needs your help. Scooter needs your help, and so do Dana, Rob, Ken, Di, Darren, Michael, and Scott McCloud. So the next time you're firing off an e-mail telling us *Mafia* deserved at least four stars, fire one off to copy editor Tom Edwards at tom_edwards@ziffdavis.com and demand that *CGW* editors go to Hawaii. Tell him you read us for the articles, not the ads. Tell him Scooter needs some sunshine. Tell him *Mafia* deserved at least four stars. Tom won't really be able to do anything about anything, but he's just about the only person on our masthead I can ask you to mail without getting me fired.

Are you with me? Are you with me? Attica! Attica!

ILLUSTRATION BY JACK HORNADY

Computer Gaming World (ISSN 0744-6667) is published monthly by Ziff Davis Media, Inc., 28 E. 28th St., New York, NY 10016. Subscription rate is $27.97 for a one-year subscription (12 issues). Canada and all other countries add $16.00 for surface mail. Postmaster: Send address changes to Computer Gaming World, P.O. Box 57167, Boulder, CO 80328-7167. Canadian GST registration number is 865286033. Canada Post International Pub's Mail Product (Canada Distribution) Sales Agreement No. 1058649. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY 10016 and additional mailing offices. Printed in the U.S.A.

ABS™ Ultimate PCs with the
Intel® Pentium® Processor with Hyper-Threading Technology

Ultimate Gaming Machine

Supported by powerful Intel® Pentium® 4 processor, ABS™ Ultimate Gaming systems are the overwhelming choice to power the hottest new games and transform your personal PCs into high-speed professional gaming machines.

ABS™ PCs use genuine Microsoft® Windows®
www.microsoft.com/piracy/howtotell
ABS™ recommends Microsoft® Windows® XP

ABS™ Ultimate X3

Blue Kingwin Aluminum Case w/Acrylic Windows & Neon Light
Asus P4T533-C Intel 850E Chipset Motherboard w/533FSB & USB 2.0
Kingston 512MB 1066MHz RAMBUS Memory
120GB 7200RPM Ultra ATA100 Hard Drive w/8MB Cache
Pioneer 16X DVD Player & Mitsumi 1.44MB Floppy Drive
Lite-On 52X24X52 SMART-BURN® CD-ReWritable Drive
ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB 8X AGP Video Card w/DVI & S-Video Out
Add SONY 19" .25mm 1024x768 Monitor @$319
Creative Labs SoundBlaster Audigy Sound Card w/IEEE 1394
3Com PCI 10/100 Network Card & USR V.90 PCI 56K Modem
Logitech Access Keyboard & Optical Mouse
Microsoft Windows® XP Home Edition
Free Games: Microsoft Age of Empires and Dungeon Siege 1.0

Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor with HT Technology at 3.06GHz w/533MHz FSB **$2199**

ABS™ Ultimate X7

Black Kingwin Aluminum Case w/Acrylic Windows & Neon Light
Asus P4T533-C Intel 850E Chipset Motherboard w/533FSB & USB 2.0
Kingston 512MB 1066MHz RAMBUS Memory
Two 80GB 7200RPM Ultra ATA 133 Hard Drives w/8MB Cache
Lite-On 16X DVD Player & Mitsumi 1.44MB Floppy Drive
Plextor 48X24X48 CD-ReWritable Drive
ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB 8X AGP Video Card w/DVI & S-Video Out
ViewSonic 22" .25mm 1920x1440 Monitor
Creative Labs SoundBlaster Audigy XGamer Sound Card w/IEEE 1394
Klipsch ProMedia 5.1 THX 6-Pieces Speaker System
Logitech Cordless Freedom Optical Keyboard and Mouse
Microsoft Windows® XP Home Edition
Free Games: Microsoft Age of Empires and Dungeon Siege 1.0

Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor with HT Technology at 3.06GHz w/533MHz FSB **$3249**

ABS

877.589.9979

Please use full URL to get latest prices and special promotions.
www.abspc.com/cg03

Sales Hours: Mon-Fri 8:30AM-5:30PM PST Technical Support: Mon-Fri 8:30AM-5:30PM PST
Technical Support: 800-685-3471 General Office: 562-695-8823 9997 East Rose Hills Road, Whittier, CA 90601

Price, specification, and terms are subject to change without notice. Picture shown with upgraded options. ABS™ is not responsible for errors in typography and/or photography. 30 days money back guarantee does not include opened software, parts, or special orders merchandise. Original shipping and handling fee along with return shipping charge are non-refundable. Products returned after 30 days or in a non-refundable condition are subject to a restocking fee. Intel, Intel Inside, and Pentium are trademarks or registered trademarks of Intel Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries.

Direct Your Ear to the Rear with Sound Blaster Audigy 2

Sound Blaster 24-bit ADVANCED HD
192kHz/106dB SNR

LUCASFILM THX

6.1

Hear all the action in 6.1 surround with a discrete rear center speaker

Sound Blaster® Audigy™ 2 with THX® certification delivers 6.1 surround sound with Unreal® Tournament 2003, Hitman 2: Silent Assassin™, and over 400 existing EAX® ADVANCED HD™ and DirectSound® 3D games. Distinctly hear enemies approaching directly behind you and blow them away before you end up in their crosshairs. Experience 106dB SNR clarity and Advanced Resolution™ DVD-Audio from multi-channel 24-bit/192kHz DACs and 24-bit ADVANCED HD™.

6.1 Surround

CMSS® 3D up-mix technology and Dolby Digital® EX support provides 6.1 surround for CDs, MP3s, and DVD movies. Make 6.1 surround a reality by combining Sound Blaster® Audigy™ 2 or Sound Blaster® Audigy™ 2 Platinum including internal connectivity drive with Creative Inspire™ 6.1 6600 – the only PC speaker system with rear center speaker and 120 watts system power.

For more information, check out **www.soundblaster.com.**

DVD AUDIO
DOLBY DIGITAL EX
EAX ADVANCED HD

CREATIVE®

©2002 Creative Technology Ltd. The Creative logo is a registered trademark of Creative Technology Ltd. in the United States and/or other countries. All brands or product names listed are trademarks or registered trademarks and are property of their respective holders.

Made with love by

RETROMAGS

20+ YEARS

Our goal is to preserve classic video game magazines so thatthey are not lost permanently.

People interested in helping out in any capacity, please visit us at retromags.com.

No profit is made from these scans, nor do we offer anything available from the publishers themselves.

If you come across anyone selling releases from this site, please do not support them and do let us know.

Thank you!